

FAREWELL DISCOURSES.

MONCURE D. CONWAY.

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FAREWELL DISCOURSES

DELIVERED AT

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL

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BY

MONCURE D. CONWAY, M.A.

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1884.

B

DEDICATED

TO MY

SOUTH PLACE SOCIETY,

WHOSE MINISTER I HAVE BEEN FOR 21 YEARS;

WHOSE UNWEARIED SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT,

NOW PASSING INTO MEMORIES,

SWEETEN THE SORROW OF PARTING.

DISCOURSES.

1. A Gnostic's Apology.	3
2. The Gift and the Altar.	27
3. Of One Risen and Unrecognised.	53
4. The Criminal Law.	81
5. Substitutes for Hell.	105
6. The Palace of Delight.	133
7. Apologia.	157

A GNOSTIC'S APOLOGY.



FAREWELL DISCOURSES.

A GNOSTIC'S APOLOGY.

MONG the earliest recollections of my childhood is the recurring scene of baptism in the river that ran near our home. Those baptised were mainly African slaves, to whom an ancient slave, by the sabbath he instituted, still brought a little weekly exodus from their land of bondage. On such a Sunday their dusky forms, arrayed in robes of cotton (their Pharaoh's livery), moved in procession to the bank of the Rappahannock, and there, in crystal waters beneath our blue Virginian sky, were immersed. Time and fate have not dimmed that scene. Still do I hear, in memory, the singing of those lowly believers coming up out of the water, oftentimes mingling

with notes of the dove, which no doubt brought to their hearts a message from heaven. In later years I have thought that to those babes in knowledge suffering may have revealed some sweet secret withheld from the master race above them. It may be, their faith saw John at their side, and Jesus in their company, and heard a heavenly voice saying—"This is my beloved." But for me it remained only a picturesque scene through many years, and indeed I had to travel far before its spiritual beauty became visible. I wandered in the morning-land of our race as one entering a new world, and once more a child, now beside the Ganges, saw again that scene remembered from childhood's years in the West. Here again were the white-robed processions and the immersions, the dusky forms, the plaintive hymns. But now I saw more: here was John in camel's hair and leathern girdle, here were the multitudes from all the region round about covering the river banks for miles, coming to be baptised, confessing their sins. In that crowd with which the Ganges and Jumna at their junction were alive I observed no children; these remained on the river banks. Only they need be baptised who were stained with sins. I remembered that in

the Gospel of the Hebrews it is said, "Behold the mother of the Lord, and his brethren said to him, 'John the Baptist baptiseth for remission of sins : let us go and be baptised by him.' But he said to them, 'Wherein have I sinned that I should go and be baptised by him ?'"

It is a long distance that the Church had wandered from the sense of primitive baptism, when its potency was supposed to be conveyed by sprinkling an infant's head. That may seem to us an unimportant thing now ; but baptism was an expression of the reasonable belief of man that each individual needed moral cleansing, that his demerits were his own, his merits his own ; and the anabaptists took a brave step away from the superstition that man can inherit the sins or be saved by the virtues of another.

That Christendom has borrowed many things from ancient India is well known—church bells, rosaries, convents, and the like. But it is of great interest to trace, by recent discoveries, the presence of an ancient Christianity in that land. I visited an ancient church in India, built on the foundation of one still more ancient—so ancient that in the early sixteenth century, when Portuguese missionaries went there expecting to find only

heathenism, they found a Christian church old enough to be a ruin. The Portuguese were pointed to a spot where Thomas the disciple of Jesus was said to have died ; and there they dug up a stone slab on which was carved in relief a cross, and over it a dove with expanded wings. Beneath it was an inscription in such mingled characters and words that it was not made out until quite recently, when the late Mr. Burnell, an eminent Positivist, translated it as follows :—

“ IN PUNISHMENT BY THE CROSS WAS THE SUFFERING OF THIS ONE: HE WHO IS THE TRUE CHRIST AND GOD ABOVE, AND GUIDE EVER PURE.”

This brief inscription was in words of various ancient languages, among them Hebrew and Persian. Pilate is said to have set over Christ an inscription in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, proclaiming Christ's royalty. But this inscription in India has a nobler significance, it proclaimed his humanity ; for there is reason to believe that this gospel of a crucified God, when carried to the East, was received with reverence by those who spoke those several languages. There is another Christian church in India, proved to have been built over a thousand years ago by one Isodatavira. The original endowment of that church has been lately

discovered ; in it a Jewish colony of the place was associated in trusteeship with Christians and Hindoos. While in Europe Jews were being slaughtered in the name of Jesus, in India they were uniting with Christians in care for a temple dedicated to the flower of their race. In Europe, Jesus was made to them no flower but a thorn—a crown of thorns. This must have been a very different Christ that was carried to India, whose Cross is found inscribed with the homage of various tongues.

It was almost certainly the Christ of the Gnostics. Christian historians and theologians have impaled Gnosticism as a monstrous heresy ; especially they have flayed that form of it called Manichæism, as its leader, Mani, was flayed in the third century. But there is now reason to believe that this outlawed heretic travelled to India and there preached a gospel which the people welcomed. The missionaries of a later gospel in India, to-day, work in vain amid monuments which bear witness to a period when the Cross gathered around it Jew and Hindoo and Persian in harmonious devotion. What, then, was this Gnostic gospel ? The Church and the Fathers so trampled that heresy, so tore up and

burnt its books, that only in these latter days we are discovering that Gnosticism represented an array of literary and philosophical men as brilliant as Agnosticism can count in our own time. The Gnostics of the first and second centuries formed no organization, but they combined the latest developments of Greek, Egyptian and Oriental learning, just as the Orientalists, liberal thinkers and philosophers are doing in our own time. They were the Emersons, Carlyles, Renans, Schopenhauers, Max Müllers of that age, and Gnosticism was a cosmopolitan Transcendentalism which invested an ideal Christ with symbols withdrawn from worn-out creeds and crumbling altars. Beneath its symbols and theosophic speculations Gnosticism was fundamentally an appeal to reason and humanity against deities upheld as figure-heads of traditional systems. Whether it were Jupiter or Jahvé, Zeus or Brahma, Gnosticism rebelled against him. It is told of a famous young poet of our time that he said, "I believe in God but am against him." That was about the attitude of the early Gnostic. He could not love and would not worship a deity whose only claim was to have created a world, mainly bad, and given it up to the misgovernment of tyrants.

Gnosticism was mainly a moral protestantism. Theology pointed to Jahv in the heavens, and Jesus crucified on earth to pay man's debt to Jahv. Seeing that, Gnosticism said to Jahv, 'Very well; take your pound of flesh; but do not expect us to love you or worship you. On the contrary, you shall stand to us for a devil, and that crucified man dying for man shall be our God.'

Gnosticism could not, of course, be free from the atmosphere of superstition in which it was born. It framed a theology on the principle of the rationalistic religions of Greece, Egypt, and Persia, that principle of Dualism which John Stuart Mill wondered had not been revived. Mill used the very language of the Gnostic, and declared that if any deity be revealed in nature it is a Demiourgos, a deity doing his best amid hard materials over which his power is limited. The Zoroastrian religion personified good and evil as equal powers. Gnosticism was somewhat more scientific than that. It regarded the inorganic world, mere chaotic matter, as impersonal and unconscious; and so it did not exactly believe in a devil. On the other hand, it first invented the idea of an unknowable, of which we now hear so

much. It called this unknowable, *Bythos*, or depth,—some incomprehensible essence far away in the depths of the universe, but by no means all-powerful over it. From this unknowable was gradually evolved the virtues,—as planets might be evolved from nebulae: slowly out of the depths came *Thought*, then *Wisdom*, then *Truth*, then *Life*. They said that *Bythos*, the depth, the unknowable, does not exist, save in these moral and spiritual attributes. These they personified as fair beings going forth to subdue, soften, and spiritualise the chaotic world. They personified the first existing being, Thought, as *Ennoia*; she was the supreme being; the beautiful reason of the universe. By the mysterious influence of *Bythos*, *Ennoia* produced *Sophia*, Wisdom, the Mother of all living things. A divine soul was breathed into this intellectual Mother,—Wisdom,—and from her proceeded two emanations. One of these was *Sophia Achamoth*, the lower wisdom; the other was *Christos*, the ideal of humanised divinity. But *Achamoth*, this lower wisdom, lost her way, became entangled in matter, and could not extricate herself. In this condition she produced *Ildabaoth*. *Ildabaoth* created the world, and became its tyrant. He was identified with

Jahv . His name means the "Son of Darkness." Since the Reformation, and the printing of the Old Testament, there has been a restoration of Judaism, and Jahv  as Jehovah has been another name for God. But for a thousand years God was as rarely called Jehovah as Jove. The Gnostic revolution regarded Jahv  as the being about whom Jesus said "Ye are of your father the Devil." Jahv  was dethroned by Christos, as Saturn was by Jupiter: and when the ancient god of titles, temples and trustdeeds, was restored, it was under the name of Father, or First Person.

Thus then we have material nature, itself inorganic, beginning to stir with an evil, brutal kind of life. But even the Son of Darkness has inherited a spark of good, and so, when he begins to create forms, all have in them some leaven of good derived from the supreme mother, Thought. The maternal principle is in leaf and flower even in the tigress and the serpent. So fast as the Demiourgos created living forms, the divine Mother infused still more love into them. Ildabaoth having created man, was anxious to keep him an ignorant brute, and kept him inside a walled garden. But Wisdom, in the form of a serpent, stole into the garden and confided to Eve

the secret of how she might gain divine knowledge. She ate the apple, and Ildabaoth's plan was defeated,—all he could do was to curse. Therefore, the Gnostics reverenced the serpent. He was a primitive embodiment of the same wisdom which was incarnate in Christ—the serpent that is lifted up. For when Jahv-Ildabaoth had produced a miraculous man named Jesus, for the purpose of extending his own power, the 'divine Mother, Sophia, sent her son Christos as a dove to enter him, and so Jesus became Christ, the lover and Saviour of man from the Dark Power which produced him. The wisdom of the serpent was now in alliance with the innocence of the dove. Ildabaoth took a terrible vengeance;—as in his other defeat he cursed the serpent, he now stirred up the Jews to put Christ to death. But they only killed the body of the man,—the real Christ could not perish.

There were various schools of Gnosticism as there are now of Rationalism, but it was something like this which, in the beginning of the third century, Mani organised into a Church, and which he carried into Persia and then into India. There he met with corresponding rebellions against the ancient nature-gods—the elemental deities who

demanded sacrifices from man but gave him no help in return. India too had had its divine Man in Buddha, the Lord who moved amid the horrid idols before which men cowered, and brought the glad tidings that the gods did not exist at all! The priests of these gods had managed to banish Buddhism, but they could not kill the Buddha in every breast; and, when Mani came with his tidings of a divine Man,—a Son of Man, a lover, a saviour, who told men the only divine kingdom was within themselves,—they received this human God in all his weakness; they set his lowly goodness above omnipotent selfishness, and there sixteen centuries ago scattered Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Persians, gathered around the Gnostic prophet, together raised that cross with its inscription :—

“ IN PUNISHMENT BY THE CROSS WAS THE SUFFERING OF THIS ONE: HE WHO IS THE TRUE CHRIST AND GOD ABOVE, AND GUIDE EVER PURE.”

A deluge of Catholic Christianity swept away that early Gospel, and restored the empire of discord; another deluge of Mohammedan Christianity overwhelmed both; and now that English freedom rises on their common ruins, the free scholar—the believer in the Religion of Hu-

manity—goes there and deciphers the inscription which testifies to the peace and beauty of that Oriental Church of Christ. Had such a Christ as that been brought into Europe there never would have been any Antichrist.

The true history of the Gnostic movement has not yet been written; it is the next great task awaiting the historian who has the scholarship and the courage to write it; but the study I have given you of modern researches proves that the Christ of the first believers was neither the Christ of Christianity or of criticism. No wonder the Church ascribes the early triumph of the Cross to miracle. Their Christ would have required a good many miracles to enthrone him in the human heart. They cannot understand him whom oppressed humanity clasped to its heart, and modern scepticism in its denials does not understand him. I heard of a little girl who came home from school in a state of indignation because one of her schoolmates said Christ was a Jew. "He wasn't a Jew, Mother?" "Yes, I suppose so," said the mother. "But wasn't he God?" urged the child. "Yes, he was God." "Then," said the child, "he cannot be a Jew, for God is a presbyterian." That child may some

day be made a theological professor, if women get their rights before they lose their creeds. She did exactly what every sect has done—made Christ its own sectarian figure-head. But the other child was equally wrong in saying Christ was a Jew. When first that figure was lifted up it drew all men unto it. It was neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Greek nor Oriental, but it was the embodiment of a world-movement, a great insurrection of the human heart against all the idle gods, whether of Olympus or Mount Meru or Mount Sinai,—against every god that had not a human heart to feel, and a human hand to help. The greatness of Zoroaster, the genius of Buddha, the inspiration of Pythagoras, the intellect of Plato, the martyred wisdom of Socrates, all were embodied in that divine Christos, emanation of the maternal wisdom and love, whose earthly witness and martyr was Jesus the Son of Mary.

A London clergyman has just been inhibited for heresy. On Ascension Day he preached a sermon, saying that Christ did not ascend to heaven. I do not wonder he was suppressed. On that ascension rests all the ecclesiasticism of Christendom. Take away that ascension and what Christ have you? Another Buddha denying

the priest and his deity. You have the religion of humanity, the religion of this world, but no authority to sacrifice the interests of this world. The ascension of the Church's Christ was the entombment of Man's Christ. Christ has so long been laid in this garnished sepulchre of divinity that movements most like his own now dare not call themselves by his name. So long as he is the son of his crucifier how can he be the son of Man? Under his name the old systems against which he protested were restored to power; altar, temple, priest, sacrifice, rite and ceremony, originally raised to deified despots, were labelled Christian because of the prestige of his name; and, now that they have become intolerable, the liberal and humanitarian world is steadily raising up another Gnostic revolution like that which his name led in the first century. What Basilides, Valentinus, Heraclon, Marcus and Mani were in the early ages, that Priestley, Channing, Parker, Emerson, Fox, Martineau, Strauss, Renan have been in our own time. Our Gnostic ancestors expressed themselves in symbols, our later liberal fathers have spoken through the facts of science and experience; but those same graces and humanities which of old were called Ennoia,

Sophia, Aletheia, Christos, have all reappeared in these latter days as the consecration of Reason, Wisdom, Truth and Love, against the ancient consecration of Omnipotent Force, Vengeance, Egotism. The Christ of Channing is the Christos of Basilides, the 'Oversoul' of Emerson is the Ennoia of the Gnostic; and the whole anti-dogmatic movement of our time, though sometimes called atheistical (it is atheistical only in the sense that it was atheistical in Buddha to deny Brahma, in Jesus to deny Jahvé, in Lucian to deny Jupiter) is really the spiritualisation of humanity, the humanization of religion.

We are, therefore, in the midst of a new Gnosticism. It has fallen on a scientific instead of a symbolical age, and its development has been, and must continue to be, much more remorseless than in the past. It must entirely do away with Theology. Theology is not moral, it is not religious; it is a professed science, as its name indicates, the science of God, and it is a science falsely so called. In obedience to the demands of science Theology has gradually committed itself to the doctrine of one omnipotent Creator of all things. It could not help that, for the steadily discovered unity of nature would not permit it to

maintain the old belief in various deities with limited powers. Theology claiming to be a science must follow with the other sciences. There grew steadily a scientific demand for unity in the first cause. The consequences of this were not all seen at once. Theology was able, for a time, to maintain a Satan—a scapegoat on which the faults and evils of nature could be laid. But that is no longer possible. Satan is no longer scientific. As an equal power he might be held responsible for all evils; but when Theology was compelled to make him a creature of God, his existence continued by God, Satan could remain only as a blot on the character of his creator and preserver. So he has steadily vanished: Theology can no longer utilise Satan. It has raised the theory of the omnipotence and omniscience of the Creator, and must stand or fall by it. It is falling by it. Nature nowhere reveals a moral government outside the influence of man. Dr. Carpenter has lately revived the argument from design in nature; but it is too late to have any effect on religion. What matters design in nature if it be not good design? What matters an architect of the universe if his edifice totters in earthquakes, and the creatures of his workmanship can only

live by devouring one another? At last comes a philosopher who has kindly taken hard pressed Theology by the hand and carried it away to "No man's land," the land of the Unknowable. That is what is sometimes called Agnosticism. There, apart from all the real thoughts and concerns and interests of life and the world, Theologians, like lotus-eaters, may dream out any supreme fairy and fairyland they please, and nobody can contradict them. A man may assert that there is a Phœnix in the moon, and no human being can disprove it. It may be compassionate of the scientific men, in removing Theology away from the domain of actuality, to humour it with soap-bubbles of this kind. Bubbles are bright little worlds till they burst. This agnostic world is very thin; and when it bursts Theology will return from its delusion to find that Science has taken possession of the objective universe. And it will find that religion has taken possession of the moral and human world.

Religion is not agnostic but gnostic. It is not the worship of our ignorance, but of our knowledge. Religion knows no doubt. Its province is that which we are certain of. There is a region of the

unknown—not, be it observed, of the unknowable—where science must ever press its frontiers, moving from doubts to certainties, and on to doubts again, in never-ending alternation. But for religion that region is represented in those emanations which the Gnostic saw evolved from the depth he could not fathom,—Ennoia, Sophia, Aletheia, Christos,—Thought, Wisdom, Truth, Love. Had he any doubts about them? Have you? Has it ever occurred to you to say, ‘After all, why should I honour Thought? Is there any solid advantage in Wisdom? Why should I respect Truth more than falsehood, or Love more than selfishness and hatred?’

It may always be said that all we know is but a small point compared with what we do not know. But it may also be said that what we realise and possess is generally but little of what we ought to realise, and ought to possess, and would if our religion, our enthusiasm, could detach itself from traditions, could stop pursuing phantoms, and enter fully upon the life and opportunities open to us. Some say that the practical sphere of thought and feeling to which religion has been relegated by the loss of ancient speculations is small, prosaic, unpoetic. We have no more any

angels and archangels, no sublime abyss of infernal spirits, none of the vast visions of hell and heaven that entranced the gaze of Dante and Milton. Well, the human religion is as yet in its infancy ; perhaps there are visions to come later ; but even now we are realising a new world around us, long overshadowed by our star-gazing neglect. From their hiding places new bibles are coming, scriptures of every race and age, and the great oratorio of humanity swells through them for the first time. Our canon is, vastly enlarged and enriched. Heroes and sages come from their graves ; we are no longer bound to think of half the heroes and sages of our race as pagans burning in hell : we lovingly walk with Zoroaster beside the Euphrates, we listen to Buddha beneath the Bo trees, we gather with the youth of Athens to listen to Socrates and Plato ; and Jesus, who for fifteen centuries was taken from us by Theology, made into an unlovable high priest and fierce judge, has come forth to our fearless research, with all the sweetness and love that melted the heart of Mary, and all the eloquence that charmed men from their idols. For one, I do not think that in all my orthodox years I ever got so much joy from Gabriel and Michael, and other angels, as in these last years I have got from

communion with Buddha, whom I then knew not, and Jesus, whom I only dreaded. If our old heavens have grown dim, we have gained a fairer earth. And if we no longer expect a millennium, we have gained the secret of further creation,—have learned the law of development, by which the best can be selected, and the good furthered. We have gained powers of healing, of soothing pain, of increasing happiness, which the past fabled in miracles. Our science and poetry read wonders in insect and flower greater than superstition ever found in planet or angel. It is true that our old faith in immortality is challenged. For ages it was made to rest upon the fable of a miraculous resurrection in Palestine, and, now that such support is removed, that cherished hope is for a time brought into doubt. It is already a fruitful doubt, and not altogether of evil. The facts of nature, the resources of man, the secrets of life and of mind, are searched with an eagerness never known before: the truth will be known; and, whatever it may be, the history of the world shows that man will adapt himself to it, and love it, and wonder that he ever loved anything else. And meanwhile, as we wait for the verdict of Psychology and Anthropology, we may reflect that

modern knowledge, combined with a growing sympathy with the human nature once deemed accurst, have vastly extended the lives of all who avail themselves of the revelations of their time. The student can now live over the history of his race ; he can journey through the stone age, and the bronze age, and the iron age, and the golden age ; he can be present at the formation of the first home, can see the village community assembling, can carry to the genesis of gods and the growth of myths a knowledge which turns them to poetry. Researches into the sciences of man, of religion, of the state, exhumation of buried worlds in the East, recovery of dead languages, have added thousands of years to our lives. Fretting ourselves about immortality beyond the grave, let us be careful that we do not lose the ever-expanding life open to us this side of the grave ! It is a kind of immortality to live over, in scientific imagination, the history of our race, and to realise by hope and thought the future of our race. No doubt there are certain troubles incidental to the transition from an old to a new mental order. The classic worshippers of Apollo and Venus had to undergo it ; the devotees of Oldin and Balder had to endure it ; and we have to endure it. They cried as

sorrowfully after their lost gods and goddesses as any one now after lost beliefs. We must make the best of our time, and honourably serve our day and generation. The age will drag us if we do not move with it. Let us hasten to transfer our religion to it, and all will be well. That will illuminate the world and restore more than was lost, a hundredfold.





THE GIFT AND THE ALTAR.





THE GIFT AND THE ALTAR.

DN ancient times negotiations between man and man were generally attended with gifts. The custom still exists in many parts of the world, and is not unknown in our own. When an important bargain or contract is completed the parties sometimes exchange small civilities. It may be only a glass of wine given, or some present for a wife, though it tends to become an abuse in the shape of bribes to servants or agents. In the East such gifts are often costly. An English ambassador would not think of approaching an Oriental prince without presents, and the prince welcomes him with the like. In ancient times the people approached the monarch whose favour they desired with offerings, and naturally they made offerings to their invisible monarchs—the gods. There

were gifts to propitiate, gifts to express gratitude for favours attributed to deities, gifts of love and of fear. Immemorial custom becomes law. Gifts once freely given became the basis of institutions, and ultimately were enforced. Presents offered gladly to a popular monarch could not be withheld from an unpopular one. So began taxation. So was it also in governments deemed divine. Gifts for the altar became taxation for the altar. Presents became compulsory, whether given in kind or commuted to money. So arose tithes and other ecclesiastical exactions. It is easy to see that a gift exacted is a gift only in name. When the offerings of primitive piety were made compulsory it was a sign that the human heart had lost its deity. The sanctuary was there to be supported but the honoured shrine was gone. The altar might stand but it was to a god no longer known.

Altars to unknown gods were not confined to ancient Athens. They are found in contemporary temples. In the stone floor of Canterbury Cathedral there is a spot worn deep by the knees of many pilgrims. There must have stood some shrine more revered than all the rest. Whose was it? Nobody knows. The shrines of

other saints are known. The holy shrine of St. Thomas á Beckett is known. Yet before no other shrine are seen such marks of popular reverence as those left on the stone floor before a figure now unknown. No doubt the gifts carried to that beloved saint were free offerings ; they passed into tithes and taxes to the cathedral, which sustained some ecclesiastical saints for whom the multitude cared little. Possibly the shrine so beloved was that of some half-pagan ideal, set up by concession to heathen tradition—a bait to attract the masses—and when these were secured, cast out, broken, so that the very memory of their saint was lost.

When Jesus came there was taxation for the Sanctuary, but under Roman power it could not be completely enforced. Tradition was in favour of it, but it largely depended on usage. Those who wished to keep in the good graces of Jahv, those who desired favours of the priesthood, those who wished to preserve the national observances in face of the Gentile, brought their gifts to the altar. Jesus did not wish to break with the altar altogether. He did not desire to arrest and stop the habit of giving gifts for a pious or ideal object, even though many might give superstitiously or

conventionally. He would not stop the widow with her mite and say, ‘put that coin back in your purse and buy something useful with it.’ He who considered the precious ointment poured on his feet for a sentiment not wasted, but well laid out, could not rebuke a sincere offering even to a vacant altar, around which hovered thoughts, memories, associations which might imply aspirations after what was noble and beautiful. He reverenced Moses’ seat, if not those who sat upon it. He wished to seat Truth on it. And on the altar he hoped to see a new deity standing, no longer the mere image of a dead god, not the wrathful and jealous Jahv, but the loving Father who cares not for himself, and sends his blessings alike upon the thankful and thankless.

Teachers have been called Atheists for identifying God with humanity ; it has been so from Buddha to Comte : but how was it with Christ ? He distinctly raised humanity above God. The altar stood for God ; on it were laid the popular offerings to God. Jesus said, let service to man come first. “ If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy

brother, and then come and offer thy gift." The altar can wait. God can wait. But man cannot wait. Hearts estranged cannot wait. The evils of hatred and injustice will not wait.

This was the religion of Christ. So much is implied in it that it is worth while inquiring whether it be true or not. We know very well that it is not necessarily true because Jesus said it, and I have no doubt that he did say it, because I cannot find any writer in the Bible, or any down to our own time, who ever thought that way. That is the one scripture that gives man precedence over God. Is it true? Is it right? Is it harmonious with the purest sentiment of religion? Still more, is it harmonious with the highest interests of man, not merely his so-called secular interests, but his spiritual interests? You must not suppose the inquiry one of mere antiquarian interest, though no doubt it is interesting to find in the far past a thinker here and there uttering a word of permanent import. To-day we will consider not so much the thinker as his thought, and that is of immense practical bearing on the time and place in which we live.

Innumerable altars surround us. On them are this day laid innumerable gifts. Enormous wealth,

vast talent, learning, energy, are employed throughout Christendom in the service of God. All these represent the costly gift brought to the altar. The world has just waked up to that fact and to estimate the resources which are consecrated to the altar. And simultaneously the Christian world has begun to recognise the fact that its brother man has something against it. It has been decorating these altars for fifteen centuries, has loaded them with treasures, and yet around them have grown rank ignorance, poverty, injustice. Nothing can be more certain than the fact that if half the wealth and enthusiasm devoted to God in those centuries had been devoted to man there would now be seen few of the evils that afflict and degrade mankind. It is not to be wondered that there should be a large and increasing number who desire to destroy the altar altogether, and to devote all those gifts to man. They would not leave any altar nor any gift before it. That is one solution of the question, and it has to be faced. It was not Christ's solution, but we have lived a long time since Christ, and are much older in experiences than he was. What is called, infelicitously, the secularization of society has a strong case. The deity to whom all these costly cathedrals, churches, ceremonies were dedi-

cated is a deity dead to the heart, discredited in the brain of this nation. The Trinity has receded after the Trinities of Egypt and India ; Jahvé has become a mythological figure like Jove ; and the terrible Judge of quick and dead, whose humanity was lost in his divinity for a thousand years, is returning again to his human life, and maintains his hold on the people as a good and wise teacher who went about doing good. There is not one altar in the country, bequeathed and endowed by the Past, which now represents either the deity or the Christ for which it was raised. On each might be written the words Paul read on the altar at Athens, "To an unknown god." Why then, asks the secularist, shall we preserve these altars ? Why should we bring gifts to them or leave gifts before them ? Why, for instance, should the millions of money locked in the English Church be laid on the altar of a deity no longer beloved or believed in ?

Practically, this comes very near the audacity of Christ's own language, and still nearer his example. For though we read of his doing much for men and women and children, we never find him bringing a gift to any altar. No doubt like other youths he carried his gift, but he must have remembered that his brother had some unfulfilled claim on

him, and left it there never to be offered. It took him his whole life to square his debt to man, and if there were any deity who desired him to leave his gift for man ungiven for the altar's sake, Jesus evidently did not believe in any such deity. That divine egotist, that selfish sultan of the sky, preferring incense and flattery to himself above man's need, had no place in the faith or love of Christ, and he would not have seen one mite given to such a god without sorrow. He who loved man more than himself could never worship a God who preferred himself to man. If he differed from our so-called secularist, if he still reverenced the seat of Moses and the perverted altar, it must have been because he believed that human reason would inherit the seat of Moses, and universal Love inherit the altar of Jahv. This might be utopian, it might be a dream ; it certainly was the faith of a poet ; but many past poems are present realities ; and we need not lightly dismiss the hope of poetic minds in our own time that religion has still a great future before it.

Let us picture some ancient worshipper of the jealous and vindictive Jahv on his way to lay his offering on the altar of his god. On his way he pauses to listen to a street-preacher. What is he

talking about? The wealth of the priesthood, the idle splendours of the temple, contrasted with the wretchedness of the people. "Is that well," asks the preacher, "is God so needy?" He counsels them to attend first to the poor, the oppressed, then see about the altar. Now, our our casual Jew as he passes on thinks over this matter. He reaches the temple, and by that time has remembered everybody he has wronged, all the sufferers he has neglected. He leaves his offering just inside the temple door. He goes off to tell some poor debtor his debt is forgiven ; pays some labourer wages he had withheld ; carries a meal to some half-starved neighbour. After a time he begins to like it. Faces that were pallid begin to smile on him ; grateful eyes beam on him ; hearts open to him, tell him their lowly history ; new feelings swell in his breast. How sweet is forgiveness! How warm is the sunshine of sympathy! What a happiness there is in charity! Why, a god might enjoy these emotions of compassion, sympathy, generosity! Ah, a God! That reminds him that he has left his gift ungiven before the altar. He has left Jahv waiting. Jahv must be in a passion by this time, so he runs, with some trepidation, towards the temple.

But when he gets there he pauses again. 'Is it true that God is in a passion because I left him to attend to those poor people? Is it certain that he is an angry, vindictive, selfish being? ' Is he less merciful than myself? The holy books say so, but somehow I can't believe in such a god any more. That street-preacher has turned my head, and these poor people I have visited have turned my heart, and—Heavens, what is that!' Our old Jew as he is about to lay his offering on the altar sees standing over it the great form of a man transfigured in beauty, haloed with light, who bends down to kiss his brow.

Well, what became of that old Jew? Did he ever carry any more offerings to the altar? That is not so easy to answer. But perhaps we may discover it if we leave ancient Judea for modern England. George Stephenson, of whom every railway is a monument, was a Methodist in his youth. But one Sunday when he was getting ready to go to church he heard of a coal-pit that was flooded. Men could not work, women and children were starving. Instead of going to church Stephenson began to examine the pit and the pumps and discovered how the mine could be cleared of water. He worked then all day Sunday,

and all the week, and next Sunday. He cleared the coal-pit. The men had work, their families had bread. Two Sundays had Jahve to go without his sabbath being kept holy by George Stephenson. His offering of prayer and praise was left before the altar. And, what is more, Stephenson never went to meeting again. One taste of the blessedness of helping man had given him a new heart, and in it was folded a new God, a God he could love; for loving such a God was precisely the same as loving man. No longer could he love a deity who desired sacrifice rather than mercy, who would turn to himself a moment or an energy which could be given to human need.

'But,' says my secularist friend, 'where is there any place for an altar in such a life as that? and why call that an offering which is simply a gift of man to man? Simply this: the altar I mean is not that of any church or of all churches together, but it is religion itself. Conceptions of a deity come and go; altars and temples crumble; but religion itself, as I believe, only grows by such decays of its idols and altars, and is absolutely essential to human helpfulness and happiness. For it means the consecration of human effort,

the exaltation of man's service above the mere contracts and regulations of the world. Political economy is a good thing, supply and demand important, laws and competitions useful ; but there is work to be done in the world which these cannot do. There is work to be done which evolution cannot do, and mere intellectual education cannot do, but which only love can do. There are regions where the struggle for existence is brutalising millions, and the selfishness of success debasing millions more. It is a region where Good Shepherds are needed—men and women who shall feel it the highest joy earth can give to rescue the wandering, carry the weak in their arms, and gently lead them that are with young. With that spirit political economy, competition and all the rest may be made to work for good ; without it they will all gravitate downward, until the sentiment of humanity, and even love itself, shall be evolved out of a world given up to predatory instincts. It may be that such must be the outcome of a society which has lost its old restraints of hope and fear—its ancient heaven and hell. But so long as I see the altar of religious sentiment standing I will not believe it. I will still believe that that altar will yet flame

with the religion of humanity ; that a liberated heart and brain will arise to direct the tremendous forces of religion towards a real human salvation ; that the altar now vacant—for which a hundred new gods are competing—will at last be inherited by a religion which shall receive the glad offerings of every great heart and brain, shall be heaped with science and wealth, because its one aim will be to send these forth for the culture, health, and happiness of mankind.

Is this too a dream ? Is it incredible that men can find a joy in loving others ? Was Swedenborg merely mad when he said “ My reward for loving my neighbour as myself will be that I shall come to love him more than myself ? ” There are some who tell us that mankind can have no motives but hell and heaven—whether selfish hope and fear on earth or hereafter. Let every mother and father make the experiment. Let them take care that their children shall have all the happiness they can give them, and then teach them that the only thing worth living for is to give happiness to others. Let them teach the babe from its cradle that to diffuse health, to bestow gladness, to relieve want, to encourage, to love and be beloved, is the object of all wisdom, all religion,—the divine art of

living,—and if the child cannot learn to find its happiness in that way, as it now learns to find happiness in the selfish way, then we must give up, and admit that virtue is a shadow. But the world cannot be taught that, while it is being taught that gospel of selfishness that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. This last would indeed be a great and true gospel if men had a God ; but they have not, they have only the ghost of a god,—a being no man worships as he worships gold, which no woman loves as she loves her babe. The altar of that god stands, but it is abandoned by the prudent while the service on it is the immolation of man.

I implore you, every honest and faithful man and woman of you, not to deceive yourselves about the signs of your time. Do not shut your eyes and imagine you have shut the stern eyes of to-day which look upon you with hunger in them. There were forty-four deaths by starvation in London last year, but who can number the living deaths by spiritual starvation ? The miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude has been explained as his having so charmed them by his discourse as to make them forget their hunger, and feel as if they had been fed. But the days when men could hear

in the so-called gospel any such entrancing tidings of joy have passed, and hunger resumes its sway,—hunger physical, mental, spiritual, which are not very different. Socialism says ‘We have no future world, shall we lose this also?’ As society, bowing with offerings before altars already rich, did not remember that its poor brother had aught against it, the poor brother begins to remind society of his existence, sometimes in rather formidable ways. The Christian world has felicitated itself too soon that it has entered with the Bridegroom, and has now only to be festal.

And here let me give a variant of an old parable. Ten virgins watched and waited for the Bridegroom; five of whom were wise, five foolish. The wise took along plenty of oil for their lamps, the foolish did not take enough. As the night waxed on these said to the others, “Sisters lend us some oil for our lamps are going out.” But the wise said, “No, we may want it all; you will have to go away and buy it where we did.” The foolish virgins lamented their want of foresight and went away to buy oil: at that hour of the night it was difficult, and when they returned they found that in their absence the Bridegroom had come and,

with the five wise virgins, had gone unto the feast. The foolish virgins hastened to the door and knocked, pleading for admittance, but from within there came, in a sharp voice, "Depart!" The excluded virgins cried "Lord, open to us!" but in vain, there came only the stern word, "Depart!" With the laughter of their more prudent sisters ringing in their ears, the sorrowing virgins went their way, but at length came where an aged man lay prostrate on the ground, fainting from a journey, perishing with hunger and thirst. The virgins hastened to bring wine and food, they supported him to the nearest of their homes: in their anxiety to preserve this aged man's life they forgot their cruel disappointment in not welcoming the Bridegroom. But when, by their kindness and devotion, the traveller had been restored, lo, suddenly, he threw off a disguise, and before the astonished maidens stood revealed—the Bridegroom! At the same moment were heard voices at the door, with knocking, and the so prudent virgins cried, "Sisters, open to us! The oil we selfishly withheld from you only brought an impostor to us." Against these the door was not shut; but nature may not be equally tender-hearted and forgiving for those selfish

saints who can enjoy themselves with the Bridegroom while the door is shut against the less prudent, the less fortunate but cruelly disappointed souls who find between themselves and that Bridegroom only a wooden door—the despair outside answered by the laughter within.

In youth, I pondered over these words of a Christian seer, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth,” and they revealed to me that a new heaven of ideals must always be followed by a reformed earth. But now, to my farther age, they reveal that equally a new earth leads on a new heaven. The old heaven having faded—its rosy bowers, and harps, and thrones, broken into drifting clouds—leaving immortality a cold Perhaps, a possibility not altogether pleasing to the weary toilers of earth, I am convinced that if faith in paradise is recovered it will be from the standpoint of a happier earth. The ancient heaven shone by contrast with earthly despair; the new heaven will reflect the glories of a renovated world. As the desolation of earth is the eclipse of immortality, the wrongs of the world are the pall upon providence. Of what use is an idle deity who does not bare his arm to save? When mankind recover their faith in providence, rest

assured it will be through the development of a more perfect humanity. The deities of the past have successively perished because they were mere embodiments of speculative theories of the universe. They were reasoned about as we now reason about electricity and dynamics. Causal power, creative force, omnipotence, ubiquity—they were the phrases about God, as they now are about physics. The ancient sky is full of such cobwebs. They are steadily swept away. Why should I worship omnipotence, or a first cause, or a second, or creative power, unless it creates well and wisely? So long as men looked that way for their deity the era of atheism was only a question of time. And every time men turned from such crude scientific notions to worship a good man, like Buddha, or Zoroaster, or Christ, it was a victory of atheism—clearing away the outgrown god, but preserving his altar as the pedestal of a better. The theological deity of our own time was a vast improvement, but his fate also is inevitable; for he wears the ambitious crown of the old nature-gods; he claims their omnipotence, but never uses it to save one heart from despair, or wipe away one human tear, much less to heal the wounds of the world, and make earth a

paradise. This idle omnipotence cannot survive in human faith. Man cannot worship heartlessness however majestic. All the theological explanations—how he can, but doesn't—all the metaphysics and casuistry in the world cannot save the theological deity so long as the facts remain unchanged, the world in discord and pain.

But when mankind turn their eyes to the worship of pure goodness, perfect love, seeing that to be the true God, however weak—even as men once worshipped their God hanging on a scaffold, helpless to save himself or them; ah! when the true religion is cultivated in the earth, a pure passion for goodness, for love, the great enthusiasm for what is excellent in humanity, then shall all these clouds of doubt and denial part, and through their rift we shall see the Son of Man once more, every ideal made flesh and dwelling among us.

If men are ever to believe in sublime realities in the universe they must first feel sublime realities in themselves. Hitherto religion has cultivated what is mean and abject in our nature. The gift that man carried to the altar was a sign of his abjectness, his cowardice, his ignorance. He was bribing a thunder-god not to strike him.

His litanies were the supplications of a slave, whose master was known only as the smiter. Until a man feels himself superior to thunder and lightning, he cannot see God. Until he knows that all the stars are not equal in dignity to his ideas, that the Sun in its glory is a poor thing beside a look of love, he is searching in a mere inorganic region and will find only an inorganic god. Why say there is no god when we have never looked after one except amid blind and heartless elements? Why say there is no immortality when we have explored only an ancient grave in Palestine, from which a man was said to have risen, and never the possibilities of our own being? Our denials are premature. We are down in the valley of tradition, and complain that nothing can be seen from a Pisgah we have never climbed.

There are heights yet to be won, beneath which the highest of past summits will shrink to hillocks. The altars still standing are witnesses of heights gained in the past and prophesies of others yet to be reached by man. The secularist has his altar also. It is his Cause. Why will the secularist not bestow his means, his energies and enthusiasm on the practical benefits to man usually associated

with his principles? Why does he not bestow them on hospitals and schools? Because he has an altar. He has a religious vision of a world liberated from error and transfigured in wisdom and joy. If the secularist defend his altar he will make it a religion. Churches will come to the brightness of its rising and restore to the divinity of man all they received for propitiation of deified inhumanity. That, indeed, the churches are doing now. The Unitarians are petitioning the Queen to forbid the reading in churches of the Athanasian Creed, which declares that those who do not believe its incredibilities shall "without doubt perish everlasting." The Unitarians may save themselves the trouble. It is people that believe it who are perishing everlasting; they have almost perished now. Nine-tenths of those who repeat it are living by the creed of Common-sense. If we could to-day formulate and endow the present real thought and sentiment, even of the clergy, we might be content. Their actual creed is not only written in the affections of their homes, in their charities, their studies, but it is shown forth in the large degree to which they are preaching a new Christianity. They are maintaining the goodness of God, not his ferocity;

they are portraying the gentleness and humanities of Christ, not his high-priesthood; they are turning the unforgiving Holy Ghost into love, and regeneration into morality. They are borrowing the gospel of the secularist. The shreds and patches of ancient dogma and superstition still investing this new Christianity cannot conceal the fact that religion is now turning from a questionable mystery to an actual morality, from an idle omnipotence to a spirit of active goodness.

While this is the tendency we need not despair, but keep our face to the sunrise. We must do our duty to our individual brother, but not for any special charity sacrifice our Cause. That is our altar. Rather let us adorn it with beauty, make it larger and freer, till genius and learning, art and science, wealth and power, come to it, touch their lips with live coals from it, and go forth to purify society and renovate the earth. Beside that altar shall presently stand a godlike form, the Human God. In the flame of that altar he will burn up the chaff of formalism and superstition with the unquenchable fire of knowledge. He will turn the wheat of his garner into bread, and with it feed the heart and soul of man. Every gift on that altar will be not only a gift to man, but more,

a trust from our lower nature to our higher. The gifts of science, art, wealth, genius, consecrated on that altar, fired with moral enthusiasm, shall return to man in a higher form—shall return as the grace and bounty of our divine humanity to our lower, steadily uplifting the world from folly to wisdom, from misery to happiness, from selfishness to love, from discord to a peace that shall have no end.





OF ONE RISEN AND UNRECOGNISED.





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IT is hard to recognise the greatness of a great man while he is alive. It has been said that great men must be measured, like mountains, by the shadows they cast, but these shadows of the great must be cast across generations. Lately I was present at a gathering of persons from various countries met for the purpose of advocating the theory that Bacon wrote the Plays ascribed to Shakspeare. They have wrought themselves into a sort of religious enthusiasm about this paradox, and suffer a mild martyrdom of ridicule for it. To my mind one need only read a page of Bacon, and then a page of Shakspeare, to perceive that while Bacon is fleet-footed, Shakspeare is winged. They are of different species. For example, Bacon often reveals his low opinion of women,

whilst Shakspeare shows an array of women fair and noble as Greek goddesses beside his inferior men. However, I do not propose to discuss the matter, and allude to it in illustration of my theme. This man Shakspeare died only 268 years ago. Of the many eminent men who lived beside him we have ample particulars ; of the greatest of them all we know next to nothing; personally. Not a scrap of his manuscript, not a note of his writing has ever been discovered. The vacuum has been filled up with mythology. The allusions to him by his contemporaries during his life show no recognition of his greatness. Only seven years after his death does his greatness begin to dawn on one of his friends—Ben Jonson. During his life an Oxford Professor, writing on contemporary literature, does not mention Shakspeare or his Plays, but after the poet's death this Professor, in a new edition of his book, declares him equal to the great writers of Greece and Rome. So does the shadow of the mountain begin to stretch and swell, and so it has gone on until its grandeur is overwhelming. Some people cannot see how a man so great now could have been so little of a personage in his own time, and fall into the mistake of ascribing his works to the greatest

man who, personally, occupied a grand place. But study of the characters who have most influenced the world shows that others of them were similarly unrecognised by their contemporaries. Neither Buddha or Christ was mentioned at all by any contemporary writer. In the absence of authentic personal details concerning them we have abundance of fables, insomuch that sceptics have arisen to deny that they ever existed.

As to Christ, no doubt a plausible argument may be made against his having existed ; but I have no doubt of the existence of a personality behind the Christ-myth, and think it may be detected in the strong contrast between certain of the legends concerning the risen and unrisen Christ. There are two Christs in the New Testament : both are more or less mythological, but their myths are mutually incompatible. One of these, Jesus, *i.e.* the Saviour, is a poor and humble man, an artisan, yet divine, going about doing good, healing the sick, eating with publicans and sinners, denouncing priests and dogmas, drawing around him lowly and loving men and women, teaching them patience, forgiveness, love of enemies, and when put to death feeling that he had been forsaken by God. The other of these

two is properly called Christ, the anointed king ; he is of royal lineage, a king in disguise, performing miracles that show off his power—even to the disregard of his neighbours' colts, swine or fig trees—declaring his death to be part of his plan, promising to raise his friends to thrones, and send his enemies to hell.

These two Christs are opposed at every point. They are swords which cannot be put in one sheath. The Gospels bear witness to the desire of their writers to build up the second Christ—the royal, official, church-founding Christ, the terrible Judge of quick and dead. But could they have invented the lowly, forgiving, enemy-loving Jesus, if no such person had existed ? If they had invented a human life for him would they not have made it more characteristic of their royal Christ ? Would they, for instance, have made him rebuke those who wished him to call down fire from heaven on unbelievers by saying, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of," instead of saying, "Wait a while, I'll send them all into hell-fire before long ?" Occasionally there are efforts to manipulate the meek, forgiving Jesus, to make him fit in with the official Christ, as where, while he is declaring Samaria quite as holy as Jerusalem,

the reporter interpolates a hit at the Samaritans which makes the whole nonsense unless it is omitted ; but these efforts only show that the makers of the new official Christ had to reckon with an existing one, whom all their skill could not harmonise with the Christ that was being made to sacerdotal order.

Now of this new Christ we may be certain that personally he never existed. The real man, Jesus, and the wonderful stories about him, characteristic of a popular hero, but much exaggerated, had rendered his name a necessity of Temple and State ; he was forced on them by the people ; but they could only adapt him to priestly and imperial purposes by making him over again. He had to be raised from the grave, carried to heaven, crowned, made ferocious, and the meek and lowly life associated with his earthly career explained as a kind of masquerade,—something like that of the Emperors who have gone about as working men to spy out what is going on among their subjects, then resumed their crowns and come down upon them. But when this royal and magnificent Christ rose so triumphantly and ascended so magnificently above his earthly disguises to his heavenly throne, according to the upper class

account, there was another Christ that rose too, though he was hardly noticed—the human and poor Jesus. Strauss and other critics seem needlessly puzzled by the incoherent accounts of the resurrection : they become plain if it be observed that there were two Christs that had to rise,—one the imperial celestial Christ who had to found a kingdom, give Peter its keys, and appoint a priesthood for all the earth ; the other, the Jesus of the poor, the friend of the lowly, the man who wept with man, and loved and lived with the humble. The royal Christ rises pompously : angels descend, — an earthquake yawns, — Roman soldiers fall senseless. It is necessary to be dramatic when a disguised king resumes his authority. The humble Jesus rises without any such display. He appears to some women who loved him, and watch at his grave. No earthquake—no angels with lightning face assist in so lowly a performance as the restoration of their friend to such people as the Marys and their brother, who dwelt in the little cottage at Bethany.

We need not, of course, believe either of these resurrections to have been actual, in order to recognise the human nature in them, and to appreciate the history that has been made by

them. A special significance may be noted in the legend of the royal Christ, that his old friends could not recognise him. A great deal is made of that in the legend. He walked a long way with two of them and they told him all about his own death, before he revealed himself. This signifies his new glory. Those poor people could not recognise in this risen god the poor man they used to walk with.

On the other hand, and in a more prosaic sense, the guardians of the royal ascended Christ were unable to recognise his lowly counterpart risen in the faith of peasants. Yet there was this risen Saviour ; and while the ascended all-conquering Christ, crowned at the right hand of the First Person was formulated in creeds, carved in churches, flaunted on banners, and borne through the world as the ensign of destroying armies, the poor man's divine Friend, written in pretty legends of folklore, enshrined in humblest hearts, beloved of women and children, was believed to be still going about doing good. Sometimes as the Christ-child he gave gifts to children on Christmas Eve, sometimes he revealed himself to the sorrowful and the oppressed, and now and then worked miracles to help the miserable. The triumphant Christ of

theology and of the priesthood was never realised and never dear to the common people ; they always thought of the man of sorrows like themselves, of the Good Shepherd carrying the weak in his arms.

During the ecclesiastical and papal ages this lowly and loving Jesus, ignored by the powerful, had his home with the poor. Gradually he took the form of their ignorance and superstition, and was thought of as a kind of good fairy. The Christ of the Church, on the other hand, was invested with the metaphysics, learning and power of Courts, and made into a majestic successor of the supreme deities of the leading nations. For many centuries the Church never preached the human Jesus at all, but only the official and deified Christ, by whose authority it reigned. But presently there began to rise men of learning and genius who read the Bible carefully and began to discover the human Jesus. They followed him about the hills and by-ways of Judea, listened once more to the gracious words that proceeded from his mouth, meditated on his gentleness and sympathy, and began to talk to the people about him. Wyclif was one of the first to recover this human Saviour so long ignored by the Church. He rolled away the stone, and the peasants beheld

an Advocate of theirs in Heaven, who had been poor like themselves, who took sides with the people against prelates and oppressors. The divine Carpenter, the friend of the Marys and of the fishermen, rose from the grave in which priestcraft had laid him and walked on English soil. When that human Jesus so appeared in England, five centuries ago, an all-revealing light shone from him on the Church and its haughty representatives. The contrast between that pure and self-sacrificing Good Shepherd, who had not where to lay his head, and the magnificent bishops was so great that it brought on a sort of judgment-day. The Saviour of men seemed to start out and part the pope and bishops on his left hand, and say to them, ‘What have you done for these poor people whom I loved and died to save? They were, hungry, and ye fed them not; naked, and ye clothed them not; and what ye did to the least of these ye did to me.’

A revolution followed. The masses felt that they had been deceived; that their loving Christ had been made their enemy; that the bishops and priests were impostors, their lives and characters just the opposite of Jesus as exhumed by Wyclif's New Testament, which that great man sent forth

to be read and preached in every village and cottage of the country. As the Lollards and other itinerants called "Wyclif's men" or "Bible men" preached this long lost gospel, Jesus appeared in the midst of the people as one again crucified. It did not make them gentle like himself. It filled them with wrath. The insurrection under Wat Tyler was occasioned by a tax, but it was really caused by popular revulsion against priestcraft. The odium of that insurrection naturally fell upon Wyclif. The great man recoiled from this kind of devotion to Jesus, but such has always been the effect upon ignorant and unhappy people of the discovery that they have been deceived, especially when their deceivers have worn the cloak of religion. The same thing happened in Germany. Martin Luther also translated the Bible, and he found there a Jesus of whom he had never heard before,—a sweet, gentle god, a friend of the poor, a helper, a lover, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. Luther dwelt upon the human Jesus—a startling novelty then—until he had a vision in a dream. He dreamed that he stood at the door of a cottage in Nazareth: a carpenter, his wife, and two lads were about to sit down to their

evening meal, and one of the boys looked up at him (Luther) and said to his mother, "shall he not also eat with us?" Then Luther saw that the lad was Jesus ; in his emotion he awoke, but he had shared that lowly meal. He awoke to the humanity of Jesus. He awoke to a new sense of the reality of that eastern story. He told his vision to the people ; he read to them the story of the human Jesus, while all around them were the splendour, the pride, the cruelty of the papal Christ. The lowly Jesus appeared among the poor in Germany, and again as a revolutionist. Up rose Wünzer and his peasants ; terrible wars were fought ; and Luther, like Wyclif in England, recoiled from the wrath of the people against those who had used the name of Christ to deceive and oppress them. Luther took the side of authority against his fanatical friends, and contributed to build up the new oppression which calls itself Lutheranism. For Protestantism also managed to bury the human Jesus, and raise the official Christ to his throne in the North. But the hero of the poor rose again ; he appeared in France a hundred years ago. The people there discovered that Jesus was a radical, an unbeliever in the established religion, a denier of its gods, a denouncer

of priesthood, and then flamed out that fury which has made the revolution a political factor of modern Society.

European Revolutions have always been at once hungry and religious. In each the situation might be described as a struggle between the human and the deified Christ—between the poor man's Friend and the High Priest of Church and State. This Jesus of the popular imagination has always been wandering about the world, befriending the poor now and then, unrecognised, a traveller unknown, but every time a great soul realised him, every time a Wyclif, a Huss, a Luther, a Voltaire, looked deep into his eyes, that traveller through the ages was seen by the people confronting the Christ of institutions as one who had usurped his throne, and in his name outraged his human brothers. The established Christ and the carpenter's son have struggled against each other many a time through history, and their conflict has not ended yet. Even to our own age, which cares little for their respective legends, they have bequeathed a very serious conflict, and one whose issue none can predict. Even what is called Atheism in our time gets its traditions and its ideas of reform from the Christ of the people, the

Christ unrecognised by Christianity. That radical Christ who denounced riches, that despiser of dogmas who broke the sabbath, that scorner of creeds who said that Love alone was religion, that socialist who demanded of the wealthy that they should sell their property and give it to the poor, that believer in equality who said, "Call no man master," whose disciples had all things in common,—that risen god-man of a believing Past has transmitted to an unbelieving Present his ideal of society, his religion of Brotherhood, his controversy against selfish wealth and aristocratic pride. And, what is equally important, the social radicalism of to-day, however sceptical or atheistical, has inherited from the early Christian radicalism an attitude of expectancy of some transformation to come suddenly. The old prayer of the believer, "Thy kingdom come," corresponds with a prevailing notion that by some great event, or insurrection, or reform, a sudden transformation is to be secured. The old idea of a millennial dawn is present in all revolution. The New Testament is the birth of a revolution, and it is a revolutionary book. Undoubtedly the reactionist, the aristocrat, and the priest, may quote from it a great deal on their side, but as they read only what is on their

side, and can see only the Christ that supports their power, the masses can see only their Jesus, and cannot recognise a Christ in purple and gold.

Now, however much we may sympathise with the human ideal of Christ—the helpful, reforming, forgiving Christ—it cannot be denied that it has all along been intertwined with errors and superstitions. The early socialism of Christ and his adherents, their contempt for wealth, was largely due to a mistaken belief that a supernatural Messiah was about to transform the world and enter on his kingdom. There was no use in toiling, and spinning, and accumulating, when all was about to come to an end. The economy of the secular world was omitted from just consideration by people who were looking for a New Jerusalem to come out of Heaven. And to-day, even where these ideas are not held, there is a survival from them in the Socialism which decries wealth, and the Nihilism that believes in revolution as a method. Yet, whatever we may think of them, these signs of our time remain ; and those Christians seem to me very blind who do not see them. There are theologians, and professors, and controversialists, who talk of unbelief as an intellectual thing, a matter of texts, and historic

evidences, or of philosophical difficulties about doctrines. They are wasting their time. No religion was ever put down because of its metaphysics, or even of its absurdities. Very few people care about such things. A religion perishes only by its heartlessness, its uselessness, its selfishness. The Christ of folklore is almost as incredible, historically, as the Christ of the Pope ; the Jesus of Wyclif and Luther was supernatural, though not unnatural like that of the priests. The difference between the two was moral : the one was human the other inhuman. And it is the human Christ who has steadily advanced, with steps of fire and revolution, and, however crucified and buried, as he has often been, has ever risen again. It is he who to-day stands at the door of Christendom and knocks.

He knocks at the door of Christian institutions which embody a Christ diametrically opposed to the human Christ who steadily gains on the heart and faith of mankind. The salient feature of the religious situation to-day is that we have one Christ embodied in creeds, in ecclesiastical forms and institutions, and a different Christ embodied in the leading thought and sentiment of every community. The creeds and institutions tell us

of a risen, ascended Christ, the Second Person of a Trinity, the Supreme Judge, the High Priest, the Head of the Church. There is no line in any creed or aspect of any Christian institution which conveys any idea of the love, the benevolence, the sympathy, the charity, the human beauty of Christ. According to these creeds and institutions the word "Christian" would describe correct belief in certain dogmas associated with that title by ecclesiastical authority and loyalty to the Church. But when we turn from the creeds, formularies, and other institutions, to find whether the Christ expressed in them is the real Christ of the community we find that he is nothing of the kind. The very clergy of the churches and sects are indignant if we bring the Christ of their creeds and institutions and say 'This is your Christ.' They warmly deny it. They dwell on the beauty of Christ, the benevolence of Christ, his moral perfections, concerning which their creeds and formularies are silent. When people speak of "Christian character," "Christian conduct," they mean nothing dogmatic—they do not think of orthodoxy or of creeds, they mean something human and humane. But that is not Christian according to any Christianity ever formulated or embodied in

any institution. Nay, it is logically fatal to the Christ of every creed to admit that mere good conduct is Christian conduct. A pagan, an atheist, may be humane, charitable, virtuous ; and if such a spirit or such conduct is called Christian it is a heresy—it is as much as to say that to be Christian has nothing to do with belief or doctrine at all, but is consistent with paganism. Yet this is just what the common use of Christian to describe conduct or feeling does imply. Such use of the word seems to me inexact, and arrogant towards other religions, but all the same it is heretical. Christian conduct used to be the killing of Jews. No church, creed, or Christian institution supplies the least warrant for applying the word Christian to any character or conduct separable from the interests of Christ as Head of the Church. Such changes in language and the current use of the moral and human characteristics of Christ to support his divinity, are signs that the priestly Christ is passing away—that the fierce Judge, the Second Person, the official and imperial Christ can no longer support the institutions built for him, but that those institutions must now borrow the growing prestige of the human Christ, the lover of all men, who went about doing good.

Though surrounded by grand churches, bishops' palaces, and other proud institutions, we can only hear the voice of the Christ to whom they were raised dying faintly in the distance, raising a smile as it quaintly says, 'Believe on my name and be saved from hell!' Accept my merits and you need none of your own! All who do not believe I am god shall be burnt in eternal fires. Sell all you have and buy a sword!' Faintly dies away that voice; but fresh and strong is the Christ who goes about saying, 'Stop your drunkenness. Join the Blue Ribbon Army. Build a coffee house. Educate the masses. Help the fallen to rise. Provide some beauty and amusement for the poor. Do away with unjust laws. Stand by freedom of thought and speech!' This is what the living Christ is saying, in whatever confused way, saying alike through the lips of infidels and clergymen. It is what he said in ancient Judea, in Rome, in the England of Wyclif, in the Germany of Luther; for, however unrecognised, however entombed, the ideal of a perfect man overmasters every superhuman god; as in the year one it dethroned Jove and Jahv, as it dethroned the papal Peter, even so now it abolishes the metaphysical Trinity and the ecclesiastical Christ.

These are passing away under the pressure of moral and practical realities. We are in the hands of remorseless necessities that burn up like a conflagration whatever is not genuine, is not fire-proof. And it is becoming a nice question whether even our own age can escape the violent revolution which has generally followed the collision between institutions merely hereditary and the living forces of a new time. Of course thinkers recoil from violence and revolution, but so did Wyclif and Luther and Voltaire: the revolutions came all the same. There are combustible elements around us also, and a reaction against religious institutions more serious in some respects than any hitherto known in the history of this country. The revolutionists of Wyclif's time and in the time of the later reformers had perfect faith in providence and in heaven; but in our own time the poor and miserable are daily losing their faith either in the divine existence or in the divine goodness; their future also grows dim; they are hurled back upon a hopeless existence; they hunger and thirst and die daily, they and their children, in the presence of grand churches, endowments, episcopal palaces, all labelled with the name of a lover and saviour of men. To my

mind it would be a miserable outcome if all the resources of the Church—the accumulated bequest of the past for religious and moral culture of the nation—should be turned into bread and meat for the millions multiplying around us. Man cannot live on bread alone. And yet there seems no help for it if these resources are obstinately withheld from the real spiritual needs of the living generation and devoted to idle forms and dead deities. Unless they can be turned into something better than bread, into bread they must be turned. The clergy, in portraying the popular Christ of Judea in order to win the popular heart, are more revolutionary than they know. They are drawing up a terrible indictment against their church. That Christ who said of a temple that lifted no burthen from the people "Not one stone of it shall be left upon another," cannot be preached to-day without rebuking every Christian power not actually and actively applied to secure some appreciable benefit.

On the other hand revolution is no remedy. Destruction is very easy: a lucifer match can lay the grandest fabric in ruins. The greatness of man is to develop, direct, control, the institutions that have grown out of the Past. If old lamps go out it is silly to shatter them when fresh oil is

obtainable and new flame may touch them. As to the Established Church, no doubt more advanced civilisation will have no such thing. But nature is commanded by obedience, and historic institutions resemble natural formations sufficiently to require propitiation if they are to be controlled. They may indeed become purely obstructive and require total destruction ; but is the Church of England of just that character which calls for dynamite ? Were it well and wise to lay in fragments the mighty machinery to which the learning and devotion of many centuries have contributed ? What would the fragments be but a multiplication and intensification of the discordant and bigoted sects around us. Is the vast endowment of the English Church to be distributed among these sects ? No, say some, but to be devoted to secular charities and education. But it is just as easy to turn the grand machinery of the Church to human ends as to secularise its wealth. When the nation grows up to the one measure it will have grown up to the other. An equal part of the endowments of the Church are its apparatus, its arrangements, its methods, slowly formed so as to reach every cottage and hall and by-way of the nation. These were all made, arranged, perfected

for God. Therefore, the best art, the finest work, went into them. All the more are they the invaluable inheritance of man. They are as easily turned to the work of man's poetic culture as they ever were for man's instruction in superstition. The right way to disestablish the Church is to disestablish its creeds, to abolish its chains on the human mind, and that cannot be done by liberationist sects which have chains of their own to impose. Does that seem too vast a work—to disestablish the creeds and formularies of the English Church? It is as easy, I repeat, to make the Church free as to disestablish and disendow it. It only needs the substitution of the word "may" for "shall" in the Prayer book before the creeds and prayers, so that clergymen shall not be compelled to repeat them, and the Church would open its door to the religious genius and thought of the country. If all the nonconformist effort to disestablish the Church had been devoted to making that little change in the direction of freedom it might have been accomplished. But then nonconformity would have steadily died out; and why not? What is average Dissent but second-class orthodoxy—a dogmatism more rigid than the Church and without its artistic reliefs?

The task of true religion is to destroy only by fulfilment. The self-truthful and exact thinker cannot identify himself with any Church that is not free as thought, but he can try and convert the Church. He can try and propagate the Gospel of Humanity among its teachers and bring them under a conviction of sin against the Holy Spirit of the Age. The holiest spirit of this age is love of man. There have been many Christs—a Gnostic Christ, a Roman Christ, a Mediæval Christ, a Catholic Christ, a Protestant Christ. The Christ of our own time is the human Christ. He is not yet recognised, but his presence is felt. It is because he is among us that we find even Bishops voting for enfranchisement of the people. They used to call them depraved, but must now cry “The People!” It is because our new Christ is human that our universities are reverently publishing and studying the sacred Scriptures of all races, and sitting at the feet of the religious sages—Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Aurelius—once declared heathen idolators, destined with their followers to hell. This human Christ, though his influence like a tropic breath is calling forth strange blossoms, is not yet embodied in institutions, but he is recognised by many inside and

outside the institutions; and these can build for him a shelter, and take him to their hearts, and gather at his feet, and spread abroad the truths he teaches, until the institutions shall find that in shutting out this irresistible wayfarer—this human Christ—they are shutting out the Bridegroom and the wise Virgins, and retaining only the foolish ones with darkened lamps.

But forget not, ye who sit outside the temple gate with this new human Christ, and refuse to enter until he is received, forget not that his recognition depends upon you. He will be judged by his friends. He will never be despised or hated for himself; but if they who profess to represent him rage and rant, if they hate and denounce, if they disregard the beauty of life, its sweetness and refinement none the less precious because associated with evils and errors, be sure they will only disfigure this Christ. Even so did the revolutionary reformers before us, when Wyclif and Luther could not recognise their ideal in the ferocity of Wat Tyler and Wünzer, and were put to shame by their followers. The kingdom of Man is at hand, but it is not an external splendour, it is inward; and its prevalence over the kingdom of wrong, throned in superstition,

will depend upon the character it develops in those who have received it, on its steady manifestation of superiority to the conventional kingdoms it supersedes. Wisdom is ever justified of her children. Emancipation of intelligence from dogmatic thraldom has already justified itself by vast results in science and literature. But free thought is to be followed by the freed heart ; these, together, are to prove that the new religion, given by inspiration of man, can preserve with usury all that was useful and beautiful in the past, adapting old forms to new functions, kindling old altars with new fires, and can also organize the new light, creating a finer man, a lovelier woman, a healthier child, a happier home than the old order can produce. Then shall our human Christ be recognised, he shall inherit the treasures so long laid up in idle heavens or in napkins of ignorance ; man will conceive a God in his own image, breathe love into him, and above the old creation will rise the new—the creation that shall show forth the wisdom and art and providence of Man.

THE CRIMINAL LAW.



THE CRIMINAL LAW.

CE live in a time of political and social sensations, but it is still true that the great kingdom cometh without observation. The eyes of the world are fixed upon critical situations of nations and ministries. We know not what startling event the morrow may bring forth. But meanwhile there is silently and quietly creeping on from phase to phase of slow accomplishment a work whose results will mould the world through centuries in which the fate of our Premiers and Ministries shall be known to the antiquarian only, and but as some teapot tempest of a primitive community.

The work is that of amending the Criminal Law of England. It is there that a kingdom is coming that shall be within every human being, as Laws of the Past are within ourselves. Honest people are apt to imagine that Criminal Laws do

not concern themselves; the laws are made for the criminal classes. So think some, but they are mistaken. The moral sentiment within us is the creation of ancient law. We are mainly what the statutes of the centuries have made us. Our sentiments follow the laws of the land slowly, but they follow. The laws represent the force of social evolution. As by selection the farmer can breed the kind of herd he wishes, long horns or short horns, the law can kill off any kind of character it desires, and select that character it finds fittest to survive.

A Trial which has been recently engaging attention supplies an illustration of this. A Member of Parliament has been on trial for violating one law in attempting to obey another. The House of Commons having refused to administer the oath to him because of his atheism, he administered it to himself. The legal oath, the law against perjury, were meant to secure veracity, honesty, good faith. In the interest of justice and morality veracity is necessary. The law has punished perjury for many ages, until it has made truthfulness a characteristic virtue of this country. With one exception. In regard to the interests of God—that is, of the Church—the law has pre-

ferred unveracity to heresy. If a man opposes the popular opinion on any subject it is a proof of honesty. If a man speaks against established creeds it is a proof of veracity. He is setting truth above his own interests. That is just what the law, by its oath and its punishment of perjury is generally trying to secure,—namely, that a man shall speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, at whatever cost to himself. But where the creed is concerned all this is reversed. The law says—‘If you happen to believe the creed a lie we will make it for your interest to tell that lie. We will deprive you of civil and political rights, we will worry you, we will fine you, until at last we shall wring from you the lie, the whole lie, and nothing but the lie—for Jesus’ sake.’ Every trial for heresy puts a premium on hypocrisy. Every punishment of free speech offers a reward for false speech. Such trials will one day be quoted to prove the religious barbarism of an age that thinks itself civilised, and is civilised where its idols are not concerned. But why this anomaly of utilising an oath meant to secure veracity to punish a man for veracity? The Crown of England comes forward before the Judges and tempts a man to tell a lie. It says to

him, ‘You have only got to take the stand as a witness and swear you believe in a Supreme Being, and you can save your fine and enter Parliament.’ If such a proposition had been made for anything but the glory of God the Crown’s Attorney would have been hissed by the nation. But for God’s sake the nation goes with the Crown, and still keeps a man on the rack till he shall bring to their Lord the peace-offering of a lie. The anomaly is explained by the history of the Christian Church. Read the story of the massacres of pagans, Jews, heretics; read Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’; see through how many ages independence of mind was killed off and servility fostered! For more than a thousand years Europe was given up to the priesthood as sheep to their shearers. For a thousand years the whole aim of its culture was to produce the kind of wool wanted by the Church. For a thousand years the heretical goats were burnt, the servile sheep fed, and there was a survival of the sheepish. We are all descended from the sheepish. Only the spiritually abject were allowed to propagate their species. That is what the law was able to do; and that is why this day we find a civilised and scientific community bowing down to a Syrian

desert-god, a courageous nation cowed by an oath-avenging phantom, and joining in a solemn sacrifice thereto of the honesty and veracity honoured in every interest save that of the legalised idol.

But if popular sentiment follow the law, it is no less true that the law must follow popular sentiment before leading it. Indirectly the masses make the laws which in turn mould them. The moment supplies an illustration of this also. Lately a mob at Sevenoaks went to the ancient park of Knole, tore up certain fences and railings, piled them against the door of the mansion, and went off singing "Britons never will be slaves." For sixty years, it is said, the people had been accustomed to go freely along the road that had been stopped. Lord Sackville seems to have surrendered. A great many similar mobs passed the laws that protect the right of way. It is doubtful whether reason would justify any such law as that the people should have a thing now because they have had it a long time. If a man's grandfather subscribed to a charity, and his father continued the subscription, he could yet hardly be denied the right to discontinue it. Nevertheless, mobs enough can determine the law. The interests of property are bound up with the

interests of order, and the law must propitiate popular passion.

The law punishing homicide with death merely formulates the popular instinct of vengeance. When a man killed another the people killed him. If he slew a popular man, or a helpless woman or child, or if he slew any victim under circumstances of brutality, the mob might torture, or burn him, or tear him to pieces. But mobs may make mistakes ; they may get hold of the wrong man ; they may hang him first and try him afterwards, and find too late that he had some excuse. The more thoughtful and judicious members of the community consider that they themselves may be some day falsely accused, but would stand little chance of justice in the heat of popular wrath. So some day, perhaps when a mob has killed the wrong man and feel ashamed, these thoughtful persons say, ‘The next time anybody is killed let us deliberate.’ Then they agree that the alleged offender shall be kept out of harm’s way until the facts have been sifted. Perhaps they will set a mark on his forehead. When Cain said, “Every one will slay me,” Jahve set a mark on him. That protected him. That is the beginning of Law.

There were other forces of primitive society which powerfully co-operated to supersede the mob, or to make it into a Court. Slavery, for instance. In early days slaves were captives ; their lives were spared for their labour's sake, but there was no good feeling between them and the poorer classes, with whose work they competed. If the slave slew another, his owner was interested to keep his human property, and often secured the life of a valuable homicide. The last mail from Brazil brought news of a terrible butchery of three slaves by a mob. The slaves were in prison on a charge of murder. The slaveholders generally had for some time been getting off their human chattels from execution that the poorer classes became infuriated. Despite the master's mark on each black brow they dragged the slaves from prison, murdered and mutilated them in a savage way, then marched through the streets shouting for the "law." That mob was a fair reminder to the ruling class of what brutal power lies beneath every Law Court, prepared to show itself again whenever the law is perverted to individual or class interest. The powerful can defend themselves in their castles, but the poor must co-operate and so make each humble home a castle.

These two elements are in every Court of Law. The Judge represents one, the Jury the other. The Judge represents the combined interests of property and authority and the idea of justice (as distinguished from vengeance), all of which are endangered by blind or unregulated passion. The Jury is the mob—made small for convenience, carefully chosen, but still representative of the multitude, the great mass, whose natural law of self-preservation and indignation against wrong, the powerful must propitiate. The Judge and the Jury are now becoming one tribunal with a common interest to preserve society. But there has been many a period of English history when the Jury—the representatives of the mob—had to watch jealously the nobles who would protect their serfs, the church which would protect its clergy, and every class claiming privilege, or immunity from the Common Law. The Coroner's Inquest is still represented in primitive regions by the Inquest of a Vigilance Committee, which is also Judge and Executioner. Such institutions as the preliminary inquiries are survivals from rude societies, and have little *raison d'être* in highly organized societies.

It is obvious that there was great gain and

social advance when mob violence, with its haste and blindness, was superseded by Law. Every law was originally passed for the protection of right and justice. This is the case even with laws now superstitious and brutal, such as those against witchcraft and blasphemy. A recent fine painting represents "An Arrest for Witchcraft." A poor old woman, handcuffed between soldiers, is on her way to prison. The armed officers and the irons seem cruel till the eye turns to the surrounding mob, frantic, furious, hungry to tear her limb from limb. Then the officers and the irons seem gentle. The poor creature will have a trial, a chance for life, and, if death, one less horrible than the mad crowd would inflict. Even so the heretic of olden time had reason to be thankful that the law claimed him.

But these advantages of the Law have formidable drawbacks. The Law, though at first a mitigation of popular fury, nevertheless formulates it, sanctions it, stereotypes it, and long after the people have largely outgrown the notions and superstitions that caused their fury, the Law goes on preserving those notions, affirming those superstitions, and by traditional punishments arresting the development of freedom, truth, and justice.

In early ages the law-maker who stood above the popular passion, yet represented its moral instincts, was reverenced as one inspired; if reverence diminished he was able to cultivate awe in its place by force. From a law-maker superstition came to regard him as a law-giver. If laws did not quite represent the mob they were enforced by authority; authority came to mean divine sanction; then legends arose that they were handed down from flaming mountains or brought from oracles. Thus these laws became the basis of bibles; and their edicts—born, perhaps of temporary conditions, transient needs, or savage superstitions—remain to be enforced upon changed eras, simply because enthroned in the supernatural majesty of ancient Law.

Therefore, there is nothing in which a community can engage so important as the amendment of its laws. It has often been said that the court-room is the great school from which a nation learns truth and justice. But it is more than that. It is a compulsory school, and is also able to teach the people error, to familiarise them with injustice. In our own time we have witnessed the power of Law to stigmatise religious liberty, to browbeat mental and moral independence, and

cause a community to cast odium upon truth and courage.

This nation worships to-day a man legally executed for blasphemy, and at the same time punishes men for precisely the same offence. There is not a man living who ever said worse things of the established deity and his priesthood than Jesus said of the established deity and his priesthood. To the devout worshippers of the very same deity, revealed in the same Jewish scriptures, as that for ridiculing whom we have seen men dragged to prison, Jesus said, "Ye are of your father, the devil." By placing a legal stigma on all who express their honest opinion and feeling, the Law intimidates thought, terrifies parents into dwarfing their children's minds, encourages meanness and hypocrisy, and generates a race of moral cowards.

There never was a new idea about religion that was not blasphemy till it became truth. The word Blasphemy is made up of two Greek words, and simply means a damaging speech. A man cannot speak truth without damaging error. If Christ had not damaged Judaism, and Wyclif had not damaged Popery, and Luther Romanism, where should we be now? Our Protestant judges, them-

selves, might be in papal prisons for heresy. Nothing is more certain than that blasphemy is a fictitious crime, just as fictitious as witchcraft.

The like may be said of other laws merely imported, not risen out of the needs and conditions of our own age and country. Such are the Sabbath Laws. If it can be proved that one day of rest from involuntary labour in the week is needed for the health and happiness of the poor, and that it can only be secured by statute, then it might be justly legalised, the same as a bank holiday. But every edict about such a day arising out of its supposed sanctity is not merely unjust, as it were unjust to prescribe how people should pass their bank holiday, but it is a solemn instruction in error and intolerance. The great judicial wisdom of the nation goes about the country telling people what is false—telling them that Jehovah made the world in six days and rested on the seventh ; that he egotistically declared nobody should ever work that day because he once got tired and rested on it ; and that people have a right to force others to conduct themselves according to such notions, whether they think them true or false. That is a solemn instruction by the chief moral school of the nation—its Courts of

Law—in a false and mean idea of God, and in intolerance. There can be no spiritual progress so long as that deity—that tired, resting, egotistical, intolerant deity, is upheld by the acknowledged source of rectitude and truth.

The Law of England is, for the most part, far more civilised than any creed it establishes. Christianity presumes every human being depraved; the Law assumes every man innocent. It is necessary to specify "man," for the Law treats woman as a born criminal. This great nation is drawing near to the jubilee-year of a woman's reign, under which it has enjoyed unexampled prosperity and progress in the arts, sciences and literature. Yet, under Queen Victoria, women are disfranchised along with felons. Under Queen Victoria, a woman, if legally married, has no right whatever in the child she bears except such as may be conceded by her husband. She has no right to say how her child shall be educated, or in what religion it shall be taught. When the husband dies he may will away his widow's children to the guardianship of strangers. This is continually done in our own time. I heard a jurist, who has since become the Lord Chief Justice of England, declare his conviction that

the barbarisms of the English Laws concerning women will never entirely disappear until members of Parliament have female voters in their constituencies. Well, that period seems far off now. The wife-beating interest of the country has just had a parliamentary victory ; the universal English woman has received a black eye from her universal lord ; the enfranchised hobnails may trample on her more fearlessly than ever. That, of course, is only my pessimistic view. I hope I may be proved wrong. But in one thing I will not be proved wrong. So long as the present law concerning mothers and their children stand on the statute-book, women will never be really respected. That great School of Morals, the Law Court,—that civic Bible, the Statute-book,—by such laws instruct every child to despise its mother ; it degrades the purest woman beneath the basest man. The truest fable of it is that woman fell from her paradise while trying to get an education, the government of that period having compelled her to get knowledge from the devil or not at all ; and the further fable, which has become fact, that when woman falls, man falls with her. Nor will man ever rise till woman rises.

In speaking of the Criminal Law, events have

reminded me of the criminality of the law. But we will return from this episode. Now that Parliament is about to revise and amend, to some extent, the Code of the country, we may well remember that itself is a High Court. The development of the High Court of Parliament has somewhat modified its fundamental structure. But it preserves still the characteristics of every court. The House of Lords is the judicial side ; even as a legislature it represents, albeit in an antiquarian way, the interests of order, of forms, privilege, all that would be most endangered by mob-law. The House of Commons represents the Jury—that is the mob. Commoners still wear their hats while they debate, for once they were gentlemen of the pavement. They were a crowd of deputations at the door of king and lords, which gradually chose a foreman or Speaker. This ancient Parliament, that august Judge and Jury, throned in the very centre of civilisation, is about to re-establish and reaffirm laws which will represent to the masses its maturest wisdom. What it loses will be loosed in legislatures and law-courts throughout the globe; what it binds will be bound in every part of the world. For England is the lawgiver among nations.

Each House of Parliament has its vulnerable point,—is liable to a besetting sin. The Jury is liable to be influenced by the prejudices of the vulgar. We have seen how Commoners can go from their Sunday billiards and other club amusements to vote on Monday that the poor shall not visit the Museum on their only day of leisure. We know well that they so vote for fear of denunciation in the ignorant conventicles of their boroughs. This is but one example—there are others—of the timidity of those dependent for their power on the popular breath.

On the other hand, the hereditary House is closely bound up with the principle of authority. Its power rests not upon reason but privilege; it dates from a social classification now known to be arbitrary. ‘Authority loves authority.’ A House resting on tradition may naturally tremble at anything weakening the reverence for tradition. Those ancient Jewish laws, long supposed to rest on the decree of the Lord of Lords, will hardly be touched irreverently by the Lords who feel that their own tenure is weakened by all that weakens the principle of arbitrary authority.

Yet it may be that this High Court of Parliament will rise to the height of an occasion when

our civilisation must make a new departure. If it shall embody the principles of jurisprudence which have been really established by that consensus of the experience of many peoples, which (and not any other *vox populi*) was declared by misrepresented Hesiod to be the voice of God, then our amended Code will show, among others, the following improvements.

1. The judicial Oath will be abolished. It can secure veracity only among the superstitious, therefore becomes daily a weaker sanction. As its appeal is to superstition, it cannot secure a real but only the verbal and technical truth which satisfies superstition, and this at the cost of lowering the standard of truth in everyday life. The Oath instructs the people that the most injurious lie, unsworn, is a less wrong than a benevolent deception under oath. The verdict of ethical science has gone against the judicial Oath, and the community has a right to demand that all falsehood shall be punished where injury, or attempted injury, can be proved.

2. Every punishment instituted in the interests of any deity or deities will be abolished. *Injuria deorum curæ diis.* This would include all penalties attached to courses of conduct simply because

condemned in the Bible. A civilised Code can know nothing of "sins."

3. All punishments for self-injuries will be abolished. Only evil has ever come of confusing vices with crimes. The detection and prevention of personal vices foster some of the worst vices,—espionage, malice, revenge, jealousy,—and tempt the base to the crime called "blackmail."

Consider the case of extreme self-injury—Suicide. The punishment of it seems to have originated in the belief that the deity had "fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter." There is an element of criminality in suicide, for the suicide may injure his family or his creditors; but it was not these injuries, consequently not the crime, that the Law punished; on the contrary, these injuries it intensified by further degrading the dead, and pauperising his family. The Law assumed the place of the offended deity, and depriving the suicide of burial rites, confiscated his property. Humanly considered, this was unjust. In poetry and history there are heroic suicides. Every juryman has looked upon some suicide—such as that of Romeo and Juliet—with sympathy. The merely papal law against suicide (for there is nothing in the Bible against it) cannot be carried

out in a liberal age, and its provisions have long been evaded by what Sir James Stephen calls "amiable perjury." The suicide's motives cannot be judged. It is unjust to punish his already over-punished family; the dead are unpunishable; and the verdict of "unsound mind" is returned. The Law has not even been able to bring suicide into merited disgrace, because the law could not get itself executed. The law against suicide has itself committed suicide, and remains an example of just the kind of offences with which society cannot deal.

On the other hand Law has been able to bring the once heroic practice of single combat into disgrace. Although duelling may hold its place on the stage in historic dramas, or those concerning communities distant enough from our own to admit of historic perspective, no duel can be successfully introduced into an English play of contemporary life. For duelling injures others, and it sets an example injurious to others, tending to foster the antisocial principle of private vengeance. The ancient ordeal of single combat acquired its sanction at a time when the man most needed by a tribe was the physically strongest man. It was believed the gods would protect the best

(*i.e.* strongest) man, and they did, being always on the side of the best battalions. But gradually a different kind of man was needed by human society; virtue meant no longer mere strength ; and now it was not the best man who gained in single combat. The gods were on the side of the bully—the practised manslayer. The good did not prevail. So experience makes a better morality. A professional duellist is not held in honour even in countries where duelling is legal.

“ You cannot make men moral by Act of Parliament.” It is proverbial, and it is true. But there is a sense in which human morality is powerfully affected by laws. Where the laws never excite the moral sense against them by their injustice, nor the reason by their superstition, where they grapple with real wrongs, and inflexibly punish actual crimes, then obedience to them can be secured. Such laws will indirectly but potently brand the immoralities which lead to crimes. There is no actual crime which is not the outbreak of some immorality. Selfishness is potential theft, hatred is potential murder. Those who have the training of children are still suffering from a notion that crime has some mysterious connection with sin, with the devil, or the fall :

a code worthy of the name would publish from the Sinai of Civilisation inviolable laws, with real sanctions—laws related to the time and place in which we live, and to the temptations of our own condition ; laws simple as the passions that need their restraint ; just laws carrying the conscience and judgment of every wise, just, and humane man and woman.



SUBSTITUTES FOR HELL.



SUBSTITUTES FOR HELL.

HE worst sermon I ever heard was at sea, in the Bay of Bengal. The preacher was a famous dissenting minister from England. A large company gathered to hear him, among them a group of distinguished Hindus. The preacher's text was : "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The main doctrine of the sermon was that if a soul has accepted the merits of Jesus and his atoning blood, his sins are not imputed to him. His sins are all there but they are covered. God doesn't see them. He looks there and sees only the merits of his son ; he sees the covering which hides the believer's sins. He may be the chief of sinners ; God doesn't consider that at all, but only the merits of Jesus beneath which those sins are hidden.

When the sermon was over I saw some Hindus, who had been listening, engaged in conversation on deck and approached them. One and all of them expressed their horror of the doctrines of the sermon. They could not understand how a country like England can permit such immoral teaching. One said—"According to that sermon the worst vices and crimes a man may commit are of no importance at all in the sight of God—not even noticed—if the criminal only shelters them under the name of Christ. England may be thankful we Hindus do not accept such immoral doctrines as that."

There was nothing peculiar in the sermon except the baldness with which a universal Christian doctrine was put. But the horror of these Hindus made a deep impression on me. I mentioned it to an English scholar and statesman in India, and he told me he had often heard Hindus express their wonder how England could be so moral with such a profoundly immoral religion. There is but one religion on the face of the earth which declares that a man needs no merits of his own in order to please God. There is but one religion which publishes to mankind that their iniquities do not impair their pleas for

salvation. That is the Christian religion. Every other religion teaches men that they are saved by their virtues and merits, and lost by their vices and demerits. Every man, woman and child in other religions is instructed every day to keep strict account of their own actions, and to try and make the column of moral gains exceed that of losses. In Christendom that estimate of profit and loss is confined to secular business. It may well excite wonder how this peculiarity of our faith came about, and I think I can tell you. It came of Paul's effort to include Gentiles with Jews in the brotherhood of Christ. For that he had to get rid of the ceremonial law. The objection of the Jews was that these Gentiles had never performed any of the sacrifices and ceremonies which Jahv had demanded and received from themselves. These observances were what they called "good works." The non-observance of them they called "sins." These good works and sins had nothing whatever to do with practical human affairs, nor with morality and immorality. The Jews did not suppose the Gentiles, in their relations to men, were less virtuous than themselves. That was not the question. The point was that the Gentiles were not circumcised,

that they did not offer the right sacrifices to the proper deity, that they did not rest on the Sabbath, nor otherwise attend to Jahve's ceremonial orders, violation or neglect of which are properly called "sins," though these sins were compatible with human virtues. Well, many Jews themselves had not complied with all the niceties and exactions of levitical law; to do so required study, pains, money, and almost the whole of one's time. Vast numbers of poor and ignorant Jews, when Jesus appeared, were burthened with a sense of their sins. However virtuous and moral as a man, the orthodox Jew felt on his shoulders a huge pack of offences against the jealous etiquette of Jahve, such as Bunyan's pilgrim bore. Jesus would appear to have tried to persuade the Jews that no such deity existed, but only an all-forgiving father who desired not sacrifice but mercy in their hearts. His teaching was little understood and soon lost. And so we find the doctrine presently developed that all those sins,—that is, omissions of sacrificial and ceremonial observances,—were paid for by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and all debts to Jahve thereby cancelled. There were some that supposed that this only squared accounts with Jahve up to date. But Paul, with

benevolent casuistry, pleaded that the sacrifice of the Son of God was so potent that it availed for all time : people need never again be circumcised or practise the Jewish observances. Also, after a long struggle, he succeeded in establishing the doctrine that the great sacrifice atoned for the Gentiles' systematic omissions too. The welcome of the Gentile was reflected in the welcome of the Prodigal Son, and joy at the recovered Pearl. You may see that here was a brave effort of the human mind to get rid of a huge mass of idle observances, accumulated through ages, inability to perform which kept mankind in deadly fear. They believed Jahv angry with them every day. Paul could easily persuade Greeks that God needed nothing at men's hands ; but Jewish babes could not receive such strong meat, and for a long time insisted on the "deeds of the Law." But Paul and the Gentile party urged that by these "deeds of the Law" none could be justified. Man could only be justified by faith,—the faith, open alike to Jew and Gentile, that Jesus had paid all their debts to Jahv.

All that was a Jewish garb of the new movement. When Christianity rises in Rome it is

with the Roman garb. The language of Paul to Jews could not be understood by the later generations of Gentiles, who received his epistles as scriptures. The "deeds of the Law" were taken to mean human law, morality—actual virtue, good works in the practical Roman sense. The Pauline doctrine that man was not to be saved by "the deeds of the Law" but by faith, was ignorantly interpreted to mean that a Christian was not saved by his own merits but by faith in the merits of Christ. That ignorant notion got into the creeds, and so it has come down to be the spiritual hunch of Christendom,—a deformity decorated by ignorant Christians, as their goitre is by certain peasants, but which fills people of other religions with horror.

This wild superstition that salvation had nothing to do with social, civic, or personal virtues, dissolved Roman society. There was a powerful development of all the kind of conduct supposed to keep people out of hell. Morality came to mean supporting the priests, attending church, making pilgrimages, observing oaths, reciting creeds, hating unbelievers, every thing done to flatter and please the Trinity. Immorality meant neglect of such things. Real morality, what the

Romans had called virtue, what we are beginning again to call such, was left to take care of itself. For ages no man dreamed that a Christian had any sacred need to be really honest and upright, and in fact for some centuries every eminent criminal in Europe was a Christian. Many men were burned and slain by the imperial church for supposed want of punctilious deference to the altar or creed related to another world, but none was martyred for any wrong that concerned only this world and man.

Human morality and civil law had thus to develop themselves without the aid of so-called religion. They received no aid from the Trinity, but the reverse. Amid the struggle for advantages, and the temptations that beset men, the Trinity said—‘No matter what your crimes towards man, only believe and worship us, and obey our priests, and these will give you an absolution that will carry you straight to paradise.’

But human society itself was also engaged in a struggle for existence: it could not exist by ecclesiastical virtues; it needed real ones, and it could only save itself by fierce and tremendous appeals to human terror. Civil Society had no hell with which to terrify the evil doer. If a man

made a slip in his theology the State helped the Church to burn him on earth, and so send him on to be burnt in another world. But if a man only made a slip in his conduct, the Church did not offer the State the use of their hell. 'They said, 'Hell is reserved for sinners, not for criminals, for people who forget God's law, not those who forget the laws of man.' The State has even now no future hell from which a chaplain cannot save the worst criminal, in the belief of the criminal class,—a belief justified by the Christian doctrine of vicarious righteousness. The penitent murderer may ascend from the scaffold to look down from heaven on the unshiven or unprepared victim he plunged into hell. The clergy are, indeed, getting wiser than their creed, and ever since the Reformation there has been a growing impression that God has an interest in human morals. By the Reformation was restored the Jewish God, and although he was a cruel and hard-featured deity, very rude and primitive, he at least aimed to be a moral governor of the world, whereas the Trinity was metaphysical, mysterious, and wrapped up in its own glory. Of Jahv's ten Commandments, five were for the interests of morality ; but, unless it be in a doubtful Athanasian clause, no

Christian creed even mentions morality. If either of these deities; that is, their priests and theologians, had brought the tremendous hopes and terrors of their invisible world to bear on the practical life of man with man, we should have had a very different moral world by this time. If every mediæval man had believed that hell was reserved for wrongs against man,—that theft, murder, cruelty, were unpardonable offences ; that God would only pardon sins against himself, as Jesus did ; that God was indifferent about denial of his existence, but not about unkindness ; would forgive blasphemy, but not its persecutors,—had that been taught in the ages we should to-day be a nation dreading dishonesty more than atheism, and holding violence to man or woman in such pious horror as that which visits blasphemy. If immorality instead of heresy had been threatened throughout Christendom with an irremissible hell it would have been almost burnt out of human nature.

Human Law had no hell to back it but such as it could make on earth. Because it had no supernatural sanctions, it was compelled to make its punishments all the more ferocious. Religion having declined to lend its full force to secular order, Society had to secure its existence by double

severity. This, as was pointed out in the previous discourse, was originally done by the mob. The Law Court followed the lines of the mob, and is a mob grown formal and deliberate. However cruel some laws may appear to us, they only reflected the ferocity of the mob while they mitigated it. Such merciful rules as that a man must be held innocent till proved guilty, that a prisoner must have the benefit of a doubt, that a man cannot be again tried for an offence of which he has once been acquitted, were legal restraints imposed on popular passions. When an infuriated mob got hold of a man, whatever his offence, death was the almost inevitable result; consequently the old laws inflicted death for almost every crime. Even in the last century there were still in England 160 different offences of which the punishment was death. The mob projected its vindictiveness into divine as well as human law. Consequently it was believed that whatever a man's sin, however large or little, he was sent to hell. One big fiery pit received all sinners, great or small. But when artists and poets began to remodel hell, and described it as made up of many mansions, with varied degrees and modes of punishment, this was reflected back again upon human laws, and varieties

of legal torture and punishment were invented. In France I have seen a collection of mediæval instruments of punishment,—wheel, rack, thumb-screw, spiked helmet, guillotine,—a hundred horrid instruments, and it was like moving through Dante's Inferno. They show how human ingenuity tried to make for offenders a hell on earth, after the pattern shown to pious dreamers in their vision. Most of them were used chiefly on supposed offenders against God, and one could feel in them an expression of eternal hatred. Not social self-preservation, but hatred was paramount in them. Hatred is an expression of terror. Long after Society was strong enough to be calm towards an offender against itself, it was in deadly fear lest offences against heaven might bring down divine vengeance upon the community. Deities are supposed to be indiscriminate when they are mad, striking right and left with their thunderbolts and pestilences. So a heretic or blasphemer was seized and sacrificed to prevent the kindling of divine wrath. And the man who so endangered the whole community was specially hated, far more than one who had simply injured a particular individual.

Civil Law, having to punish offences against

God as well as man, learned that it was always secure if it represented popular hatred, and as this hatred especially attached to offenders against the gods, the Law stigmatised all crimes as offences against the gods. They told every criminal he was instigated by the devil, so invoking popular hatred. So long as fear of the devil and hell prevailed that was a pretty strong force, and, in superstitious minds, there is still a feeling of hatred towards offenders proportionate to their appearance of irreligion. No murderers in the country, no adulterers, no thieves, are so much hated as the leading atheists. Pious people do their best to anticipate hell for them, and with a certain success. Now, it is just that kind of hatred that Civil Society is apt to covet. The judges never liked to have the gods monopolise such a force. Philosophic jurists did not like to see that kind of pious animosity directed only against fictitious offences—like sabbath-breaking and blasphemy—and therefore animating only fanatics and zealots; they desired to see that holy hatred directed against the murderer and the thief. Now that Satan is no longer Chief of Police nor hell a Newgate, there is fear that crime may be considered a mild affair. It is natural that legal

severity should increase. It seems that Satan is to be summoned in a new form. The "History of the Criminal Law of England," by Sir James Stephen, ought to be studied as an English Bible—with the most solemn sense of its importance, but also with the extreme critical care; for though Sir James Stephen as a gentleman is apparently a freethinker, as a jurist he borrows thunderbolts from the god of vengeance. In this book Law is the image of Him who is angry with the wicked every day. Its theory of punishment is that it should express popular hatred of the wrong-doer—not merely of the crime but of the criminal. "The sentence of the law is to the moral sentiment of the public in relation to any offence what a seal is to hot wax. It converts into a permanent final judgment what might otherwise be a transient sentiment." There are "bad men who are the natural enemies of inoffensive men just as wild beasts of prey are the enemies of all men." They ought to be destroyed, thinks Mr. Justice Stephen, and he adds:—"It is highly desirable that criminals should be hated, that the punishments inflicted upon them should be so contrived as to give expression to that hatred, and to justify it so far as the public provision of means for expressing

and gratifying a healthy natural sentiment can justify and encourage it." The able author and Judge who wrote this has done great service by his efforts to eliminate from the code all recognition of offences against God. He would not punish any offence that is not an appreciable injury to man or to society. In this spirit the new Criminal Laws Amendment Act has been framed, and if it can only be passed it will be an immense step in civilisation. The danger will probably be from the Bishops, always the dead-weight on Parliament, for they can hardly fail to see in this new code notice given to the gods that superhuman and supernatural interests can no longer be protected by the laws of England. If deities choose to strike people dead for denying their existence, to punish people for sabbath-breaking, or otherwise vindicate their majesty, they can do so. But the arm of England can no longer do it for them. A period has arrived when the law is only enfeebled by declaring things to be criminal which are humanly speaking harmless, or even worthy of respect. Working on Sunday is condemned along with theft, yet the ablest men in England work on Sunday. By the law a man who lends another Emerson's works or Martineau's is more

criminal than a wife-beater. Such nonsense is the degradation of all law. Its term has nearly come. Society is entering on serious emergencies. Its thousands of population have multiplied to millions; the struggle for existence has made society a camp of divided classes; with new temptations old restraints have been weakened, by the growing intelligence which has simultaneously increased the means and opportunities of crime. If the gods gave society any help in these emergencies their affairs might be helped in turn. But they do not. On the contrary, still from thousands of pulpits are they compelled to tell the people that their righteousness is but filthy rags; that their merits and good works are worthless. The gods still proclaim a hell, but it is only for sinners—that is for offenders against themselves—and bind themselves to welcome all orthodox criminals into heaven, and give them the pleasure of seeing the unorthodox, though benefactors of mankind, in hell. Under these circumstances it is necessary that society shall give all its attention to taking care of itself. These filthy rags of human righteousness which the gods so despise are of considerable importance to us poor mortals. Those rags are

the virtues which support our homes, the self-restraints which render society possible, the mental and moral conditions under which alone we can make our planet habitable. As no creed mentions man's duty to man, the church cannot complain if our code shall omit all mention of man's duty to the deity.

Civilisation of codes is prevented by fear of appearing to countenance impieties by repealing old statutes against them; and such fears have retained laws against certain private vices, with which, however vile, Law can only strive unlawfully. It is remote from the purposes of Law to think for a moment of theology or abstractions. Its business is to secure justice between men, and preserve the order and peaceful conditions of society. The Law can not safely punish immoralities that injure only one's self. Not only does that lead to espionage, malicious accusations, and blackmail, but should fanaticism gain power, it might find in such law authority for punishing theatre-going or dancing, or other praiseworthy conduct it might fancy vicious. On the other hand society must necessarily punish even a man's virtues if they threaten social or national existence. A man may aim to overthrow the authorities of

his country for the sake of better. The Law must punish him. This necessity is a means of reform. A distinguished lady has refused to pay taxes because her sex is oppressed, degraded, and cruelly wronged by the laws, in amending which she has only such power as she has exercised. The Law distrains on her property. It cannot do otherwise, however honourable or just her action. For if all were to do so government would cease. It is because that supreme necessity of self-preservation is the government's first law that its injustice in any particular can be exposed by a passive revolt on principle. For then the government is compelled to punish justice as if it were a crime. In that way the Quakers proved too strong for oppressive laws, and no doubt the Ladies would be equally successful should they refuse to support a government which treats them, politically, as slaves. Unjust laws are really very weak; they cannot execute themselves without a kind of suicide. And this because of the principle suggested by Mr. Justice Stephen, that Law must represent and give shape to popular hatred. Law cannot go on punishing as crime what is no longer an object of popular odium. Much less can it continue to punish what the majority admire, as

they do genius, freedom of mind, learning, however associated with heresy. The law, therefore, is now steadily compelled to place itself on a human basis, to concentrate itself on the work of exterminating offences injurious to society, of securing justice and order, and the public health.

What then would be the right sanctions of laws thus purely human? Mr. Justice Stephen says, punishments should give expression to popular hatred of the criminal. That is a survival of the wrath of God upon his enemies. It is the substitute for Hell in an age of reason. Hell being no longer believable by the educated—no longer a restraint on the masses who hear it laughed at by the learned—it is proposed to carry its spirit more fully and avowedly into the new laws. For Hatred will always make a hell wherever it moves. It is no new thing among executors of the laws however novel its appearance as a theory of punishment. In the past it has made several hells on earth. One of these was in Tasmania, the famous Norfolk Island. A young Australian, the late Marcus Clarke, went to that region and studied the facts concerning the treatment of convicts there, and he has embodied them in a powerful novel. He told a friend of mine that he found

some features of Norfolk Island too horrible to be described in his book, but there is enough in the story entitled "His Natural Life," to show how easily hatred develops a hell. The theory of punishment at Norfolk Island was, apparently, that whoever was sent there by the wisdom and justice of England was an enemy of mankind just as if he were a fierce beast. As such he was treated, until death relieved him, and according to a report to the House of Lords prisoners sometimes killed each other without malice in order to get hung.

But, as a matter of fact, the wisdom of England was sending out there many people who were by no means wild beasts, and some who were even good people. The Hell of orthodoxy scandalises thoughtful people because so many varieties are put into one and the same fiery Pit, on the ground that if one is not elect it matters not how good or bad he may be, humanly considered. Norfolk Island, for a time, nicely copied Calvin's Hell. The murderer and the poacher, the burglar and the resister of some aristocratic oppressor, the brutal homicide and the patriotic rioter, were alike plunged into that abyss of woe. Norfolk Island had nothing to do with that. It knew

no differences of character. Whoever came was to be treated as an enemy, with hatred.

Among those exiled to that far hell some were innocent. One such is the hero of Marcus Clarke's story; he was found near a murdered gentleman in this country, appearances were against him, and he was sentenced "for the term of his natural life." A refined and intelligent youth is seen sinking down, and ever down, into bitter and sullen despair under his miserable environment. A routine of hatred, ferocity, brutality makes him over into its image. The brightest feeling in him has to take the shape of reyenge. You may discover in that remarkable book some of the secrets of a hell. There is a method, in the madness of superstition. Why is hell prepared for the devil and his angels? Because when life is without hope man becomes a demon. Why is hell eternal? Because amid all that is vile and base no moral forces can work; if they remained it were only to increase pain. The only relief is to be rid of them. As a race of fishes dwelling in a dark cave can never develop eyes, so amid total moral darkness and hopeless despair no upward development can take place. Therefore, if there were such a place as Calvin's Hell

it would have to be eternal, and it would naturally evolve a population of devils.

But, meanwhile, what advantage was secured for society by all the hatred which was visited on those exiles at the Antipodes? No doubt rumours reached the roughs of England that Norfolk Island was an earthly hell, and made them anxious to avoid it. But they also reached the humane and just in England, and they abolished that hell. The amount of hatred put into the punishments was suicidal. The conscience of the country would not tolerate a hell anywhere outside its theology. And the conscience of the country was right. It may be fairly supposed that if an all-knowing God keeps a hell he knows what he is about. He can see into hearts, weigh motives, estimate guilt, assort punishments. But all-seeing power is not given to judges, juries or gaolers. They cannot be depended on always to condemn only the guilty; they may be hating and maltreating men whose crimes, like those of Christ and Socrates, may some day prove virtues. Therefore, Society cannot find any substitute for Hell. The theory of punishment by hatred cannot be maintained. Whether it would work well or ill, it has

always broken down and must break down, because where people dwell together in society there grows up an instinct of humanity. Without it society would dissolve ; but so long as it exists it will always have pity on weakness, on helplessness, even amid its faults or crimes. As society grows too strong to be afraid of a criminal, it grows ashamed of using its immense power on him. The unarmed man on the scaffold is an object of compassion. Is it merely maudlin sentiment ? No ; though it often seems so. It is never excited by a rational punishment. It arises when society pays brutality with brutality. A great nation strangling an unarmed man is a mean sight, and it now has to be done in a corner.

No punishment of which Society is ashamed can be an effective one. Also, no punishment that cannot be impartially dealt out can be an effective one. The country has been lately disgraced by taking up the knout which Russia had laid aside. The "cat" will be shortlived. Members of Parliament have taken care not to make flogging the penalty for crimes of their own class ; fine gentlemen may seduce and ruin their victims without being flogged. That is reserved for crimes to which gentlemen are not tempted.

When the masses are presently in power the lash may fall on a gentleman, or perhaps on a woman ; then this silly excursion into barbarism will end. The odium will fall, not on the crime, but on the new law—which, if it has accomplished anything, seems to have only changed robbery with violence into robbery with murder.

Human progress leads on a new heaven and a new earth ; but not a new Hell. On the contrary, the social progress, for which our time is pre-eminent, involves further growth of the humane sentiment which tends to think kindly of enemies, and a culture of the intellect which recoils from the old theories of evil conduct. Hatred of the criminal was the natural outcome of belief in human depravity—in diabolic possession. Intelligence now knows that crime is a rude and ignorant outbreak of motives and desires common to all. The criminal wants money, satisfaction of his senses ; that is what everybody wants. He cannot be condemned for that. He seeks his satisfactions selfishly. He cannot be quite hated even for that. There is a worse and sly selfishness which takes care to keep itself out of the clutches of the law. About crime there is often a certain incautiousness, an impulsiveness, which mitigate our feeling towards the

average criminal. We must punish him for not considering the equal rights and needs of others. No doubt it was largely of his ignorance, bad training, rudeness ; largely, perhaps, because in childhood he was taught that the great point was to flatter God and despise good works. However that may be, we can only by exact and unfailing punishment direct popular hatred against the crime itself. and where it is base, deliberate, malicious crime—suggesting the cunning and venom of the lower creatures, we must provide means for its extirmination. If the law of capital punishment could be carried out, it would have the advantage of preventing the propagation of the seed of violence in the Earth. It is a failure, because, for many reasons, two-thirds of the murderers escape. There are many murderers abroad whom a revocable punishment would have brought under the control of Society. Healthy work, good food, kind treatment, amusement—all this they might well have ; and the satisfaction of making wildernesses blossom by their toil ; but offspring must be denied them. That alone is needed to end murder. The race of the violent and cruel must end. They must follow the wolves, so that the peaceful herds may appear.

It is the peaceful who must inherit the earth. It belongs to those who nourish, not those who destroy it. So fast as the peaceful multiply their species they will do away with the religion, the methods, the temptations of the violent. The free trade in alcohol will be no more allowed by the Coming Man than free trade in poisons; the man who makes a pistol or dagger will be regarded as an accomplice of murder; and one who teaches people to worship a vindictive god, or terrifies them with a superstition about hell-fire, or instructs the young that they need no virtues or good works for salvation—these will be regarded as the discredited priests now called Fortune-tellers are regarded. Not that they will be dealt with as we now deal with Fortune-tellers, or with the Peculiar People whom the Laws punish for obeying the legally established Bible. The Law will take care not to proclaim as the command of God on Sunday what it has to punish on Monday. Fine as the instruments of science, will be the perfected methods by which Law, liberated from rude antiquity, will meet and deal with every shade and variety of human tendency and error. Detached from tradition, concentrated on actual and human interests, regenerated Law will instruct every

child born into the world in the worship of Love, the hatred of injustice. The remorseless necessities of social self-preservation are writing the laws of the future on tables that will not be broken ; they will be allied with science as old laws were with superstition ; and, knowing how to conquer evil with good, ignorance with wisdom, they will cultivate a society in which tares need not be hated or burned, because tares cannot grow in any world made by man.



THE PALACE OF DELIGHT.



THE PALACE OF DELIGHT.

DN the Heimskringla it is related that in the reign of King Freyr and his Queen Gerder, the Swedes enjoyed a Golden Age. Freyr and Gerder received taxes from the people only to give all back again in benefits, and devoted their lands and wealth to the welfare and happiness of their subjects. The result was that generosity became the custom of the great and powerful. There was no war. Dishonesty was unknown : a gem left on the highway would remain untouched. The time was afterwards called the great Frode Peace. Another characteristic of this great Frode Peace was, that the gods were forgotten. All except Freya, the goddess of Beauty, after whom the sixth day of our week is named. Instead of celestial deities, the people worshipped Freyr and his Queen

who did so much for them. But Gerder died, and at last Freyr died. His ministers, fearing the effect of the event on the people, concealed the king's death for a long time : they placed Freyr's body in a mound, with apertures into which they shoved the still regularly paid taxes. But at last it became known that Freyr was dead. Then the Swedes called him the god of this world. They would not burn his remains, but preserved them, in belief that the very body of Freyr would bring Sweden good seasons, prosperity and happiness. But Freyr's remains did not work the charm of Freyr's self, and of his dead Queen. The people offered sacrifices to the remains, freely giving their cattle and their means to him who had given them so much. But they only made themselves poorer ; they brought not back the happy time. They built great temples, coined gold, plundered each other and other countries to pay for the temples ; but ever farther they passed away from the Frode Peace. Freyr's descendants, reigning on the prestige of his goodness, were selfish and drunken. Thus the remains of the best of kings, being worshipped, undid all the good he had done while living. The worship of Freyr became a curse to his beloved people.

With changed names, this Norse Saga might be a chronicle of our own time. We too are worshipping the remains of a good king. There was one who went about doing good ; whose greatness, devotion, wisdom, made the people forget their gods ; Jove was forgotten, and Jahvé, and Apollo ; and men worshipped that man as the god of this earth. When he died his ministers would not admit it ; they pretended he was still alive. And when it became known that he was dead, they worshipped his remains—his crucified body. They gave their all to the dead Christ, but there was no return. Cathedrals rose, bishoprics, empires : each claimed consecration from the dead king ; for them the people parted with their means, their intelligence, their health ; but they never brought back the happy era of the Prince of Peace.

However, in the course of time these humble worshippers did get a certain happiness. There was fostered a faith that their good king, though dead as a man, was still alive as a god ; that he was dwelling in a realm where the Golden Age was perpetual and would receive them there at death. A beautiful picture of heaven was painted out of the old Golden Age pigments. For ages the people endured sorrow, poverty, pain,—still giving away

their means of earthly comfort,—sustained by the faith that all these sacrifices and afflictions worked for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. So long as that faith was perfect, living, real, the pauper had little reason to envy Dives.

But things are to us what we believe them to be. To his lowly loving subjects that heavenly king has long ceased to appear. Alas, the good king is dead. His mansions prepared for the poor have faded. The death is perfectly well known to the king's ministers, though they dare not let the people generally know it. They keep the Christian Freyr in a decorated dome; they receive the taxes for him just as when he was alive. But the fact, long whispered from scholar to scholar, critic to critic, begins now to reach the poor and ignorant. This day, in every city, some assembly of toiling men is gathered to say—‘That good Christ is dead. These churches and chapels are only his funeral mounds where taxes are paid to be enjoyed by ministers who pretend he is alive. Were he alive would he leave us in our poverty and misery? Were he on the throne of the universe, would he permit millions to suffer on earth? Or, if he means to pay us for earthly loss with heavenly

gain, would he not proclaim that fact, write that hope on the sky, to reassure a faith resting on discredited authority? The age of denial has come and he gives no sign. Be sure he is dead. And, if so, what is left us? If in this world only we have hope we are of all men most miserable, because in this world we have no hope. And if we revive after death in a universe where there is no loving Christ to receive us in heavenly mansions, our case is even more hopeless. We will not even be allowed to rest from our labours, but again be caught up on the crushing wheel of an existence whose cruelty we have already proved.' Deeper every day strike the roots of the Revolution, and deep in the heart of it are these misgivings of those whose earthly hope has long gone out. For the most part those chiefly involved have not reached their despair by any process of reasoning, nor are they conscious of the feeling that gathers force in them.

The great change that has come over Christendom is due to the decay of faith in Heaven at a moment when the struggle for existence makes earth a hell for millions. It is not a question of immortality. Our theologians seem to think they are saving men from despair when they show anthropological possibilities that individual con-

sciousness survives death. They are grievously mistaken. Unless they can give mankind arguments to prove that there will be a miraculous transformation after death, that a supernatural Saviour exists who will change poverty to wealth, ignorance to wisdom, disease to health, vileness to purity, mourning to joy, their scientific immortality only adds a new terror to death. The five millions of Buddhists, who believe in no good God, look upon immortality with dread, and hope only for eternal repose. The ancient Greeks shuddered at their future life, as likely to be worse than this. Mere naturalistic views of immortality are terribly portrayed by Shakspeare :—

“ Ay! but to die, and go we know not where ;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot ;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod ; and the de-lighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice ;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world ; or to be worse than worst
Of those, that lawless and uncertain thoughts
Imagine howling !—’tis too horrible !
The weariest and most loathed worldly life,
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.”

Were death a dreamless sleep, says Hamlet, it were a consummation devoutly to be wished. It was amid such horrors of apprehension that the human heart heard the glad tidings of a divine Saviour, a risen Saviour, who had prepared an abode of bliss for those who gathered to his fold. The deities of natural religion gave no such hope. It was under them that the human woes took place. They were not of men, nor concerned about men, save for their offerings. Just as little now can any abstract Theism bring comfort and hope to mankind. Why should a man who under God is born in the slums of London suppose that under God he might not be born again in the slums of some other planet? No, a divine man was the only guarantee of any future happiness. A miraculous and miracle-working Christ represented human hope. That was Christianity when it was a real power. A mere rationalistic Christ,—a good and wise man teaching moral truths,—that is the mere ghost of the Christ who once commanded the enthusiasm of mankind. At sound of a trump he was to bring the dead to life, to catch up his believers into glory, to clothe them with light, to fill their once pallid lips with songs of joy, to make their ashes blossom into splendour,

to set them on thrones! Take away that vision, and the poor suffering believer relapses back into a mere toiling serf, or drudge in Jewish Ghettos,— looking forward to an eternal serfdom and an eternal Ghetto.

Now, it is just that vision which has faded. The educated clergy do not uphold it any more. The Catholic Church even shows hardly more than its spectre. Theologians still believe in a God, and in immortality: but the heavenly prince watching over man, and his heavenly Palace of Delight, have faded away. Who is responsible? The sceptic? The heretic? Nay, he is among the sufferers. Everybody holds on to a happy faith as long as he can. The revolutions of the planet have not gone on more necessarily than the revolutions of belief. When gods die it is by a natural death. The progress of knowledge is the inevitable attendant of man's adaptation to his world. As Feudalism dies, and feudal castles moulder away, so under the remorseless touches of time has crumbled man's heavenly Palace of Delight.

It might have been expected that when man's “cloud capp'd towers, and gorgeous palaces, and solemn temples,” had faded, his whole world would

have dissolved and left not a rack behind. Such is not the case. Mankind have not quite sunk back into despair. That may come, but it has not come yet. The social upheaval which has followed the decay of faith—called Nihilism in one place, Communism in another, Socialism in another,—are phenomena reporting the decline of Christian hopes, but they also show a tremendous effort on the part of the people to try and make up for their lost paradise with a real one on earth. Among them no doubt is a good deal of despair. The £137,000,000 annually spent in England for drink, more than half of it by the poor, indicate how many are victims of Giant Despair. But another tale is told by the revolutionary and socialistic tendencies of the masses of Europe, which give their rulers so much trouble. Such movements ought, on the contrary, to inspire hope. They show that mankind do not mean easily to let go those visions of a happier life which Christianity has so long raised before them. They may despair of their realisation beyond the grave, but that only shifts them back to this world and this life. Nor will they be easily defeated. It may cost social and political revolutions, but we may rest assured that the agitations of the world will

not cease until there shall shine fair in the sun man's earthly Palace of Delight. That I believe to be a healthy and human hope, the desire of all nations which shall come. Not that it is to come as demagogues say, and their follower's fancy. It certainly will not come by giving power to ignorance and rudeness. It will not come by levelling downward. It will come by the conversion of intelligence, religion, and wealth from other-worldly to humane and present purpose.

The people have great power—irresistible power, but it is apt to be destructive if not directed by wisdom and knowledge. When the rightful leaders of thought, those who ought to be guides and teachers, hold their peace, the stones cry out. It is a stony voice, a hard, brutal voice, fierce and revolutionary. Nevertheless, it is a voice that makes itself heard ; it tells of a pain that must be cured, a need that must be met. See that crowd in the wilderness, from all the region around Jordan. They gather around a wild, half-clad dervish, who baptises them in a river, and preaches in a ferocious way, declaring the established religion, the priests, the authorities, to be a generation of vipers, announcing that he means to lay an axe at the root of the whole social tree and

cut it down. But now a voice is heard—make way! Lo, there steps forward a young scholar from the College of Jerusalem, a youth of ancient lineage, an orator able to speak as never man spake! Does he come to scoff at this rude Salvation Army of the desert dervish? Nay, he says, to the half-clad fanatic, ‘Baptise me! I take your side. I too will declare war against these hypocrisies, wrongs, falsities!’ John is on his knees in an instant, declares he is unworthy to tie his noble convert’s shoes, cries out, ‘Nay, baptise me!’ But the learned youth connives with no superstition or fanaticism. He baptises nobody. He teaches the people the wisdom of all the Past; he turns them to the true ideal; he bids them throw aside their Jewish prejudices, take the Roman by the hand, accept the Greek, work for to-day and for all humanity.

Whenever a happy and true change is effected in the world, that scene is re-enacted. It does not indeed require a descendant of kings, a descendant of David and Solomon, but it requires the man who brings the wisdom and the fervour of every thinker and poet; it requires the men of genius, knowledge and refinement, who are able to abandon the interests of self and class, sell all

they have for the poor, and take their stand beside the cause of humanity in its lowness and weakness. Such are called the Saviours of mankind.

Now let us turn to our own time and country. I am not inclined to take a pessimistic view of our condition. The primary need of a population is food, and this country is fed. So far as bread and meat are concerned this nation is communistic. Any man, woman, or child who to-day has not bread and meat to support life may go and demand it as a right of the officer appointed to give it, without payment. When Louise Michel, the French communist, lately visited this country, she returned to Paris and said there was no use in agitating socialism in England, because it is already so socialistic. The English poor laws and system of out-door relief are more socialistic than those of any country in the world. They were never demanded by the masses, they were passed by the political economists. Again, so far as regards sanitary matters, no nation has done more for health. The daily food of the cities is tested, the water is watched, the drainage is fairly attended to ; the death-rate of London is so low as to be the envy and wonder of all cities. That was never demanded by the masses ; it is the work of

our men of science. The great physical evil of the country is the overcrowding of cities and of houses. From that comes much disease and much immorality. And itself comes chiefly from overpopulation of the country, combined with antiquated land-laws which prevent free and full tillage of the soil by the people. Dr. Martineau has bravely warned the country that unless the increase of population were checked we could only look forward to becoming another China, with a riot of infanticide and suicide. So long as the preservation of game and propagation of paupers are regarded as sacred principles of Christianity there is little prospect of dealing directly with that class of evils. But indirectly they are dealt with, powerfully too, by all the agencies which tend to educate the people. For we are educating the people. They did not clamour for it; a large portion of the masses have even to be compelled into education. It was the demand of the upper classes that their coming master, the democracy, should be educated. Educated people never multiply like paupers. Culture subjects sensuality to prudence. Therefore, notwithstanding all the poverty and suffering around us, the merely material progress of the country, if not quite

satisfactory, is fair. Those of us who remember the London of twenty years ago—the Seven Dials, the St. Giles, St. George's, and Field Lane of that period, know very well that there has been vast improvement in the material environment of the masses.

Yet this external improvement fails of contributing much to the great object of life—happiness. You cannot add to the happiness of a man merely by adding education. If you could add a human brain to a dog you would only increase his misery at finding himself in a kennel. If you cannot relieve a spiritual hunger it is only cruel to make it conscious of itself. It is probable that, for the time being, our public schools are intensifying the unhappiness of the poor by making them realise their poverty. Their coarseness is exposed under the eyes of their better-taught children, who in turn chafe at their environment. The old happiness of feeling near and dear to Christ, which exalted the humble and made wise the simple—that is largely gone. Nothing has come to replace it. In his improved condition the working man, the poor man, is unhappy. Let it be clearly understood that man can have no higher aim than happiness. It is only mental confusion to suppose

that man ought not to regard happiness as his chief end. Man may seek happiness in high things or low things, in heaven or earth, in unselfishness or selfishness, in thought or in alcohol—he is sure to seek it. No other motive of human conduct has ever been present even in self-mortification and self-sacrifice. Whether in the service of God or of Man we are all set by secret and inviolable springs to the search for happiness. The aim of morality is to induce man to seek his happiness in high and pure and large ways, harmonious with his own complete well-being, and with the well-being of others. It used to consist in seeing after the well-being of God, but it has gradually tended earthward and manward. But unhappily it finds so many millions fettered to the ever-pressing necessity of preserving their bare lives, from day to day, that ideas of happiness are apt to be cast in that narrow and selfish mould. Selfishness and unselfishness both seek happiness, but selfishness seeks it in personal pleasure apart from others ; unselfishness seeks it in promoting the happiness of others. Selfishness is the survival of the brute in man. The utterly selfish man lives amid society as in a jungle. He seeks his prey. He leaps on his victim with blind ferocity

if he be ignorant, with clever dexterity if he be educated.

What is to bind that animal passion? What is to draw that fierce creature out of himself? The fear of hell, the hope of heaven, used to do it. But these motives have become weak in all—in the majority have vanished altogether. How many men in this metropolis are prevented from self-indulgence by fear of the devil, or by belief that they will be paid a premium for every pleasure given up? Our average rough fears neither God nor devil. The old spell has lost its charm. We need a new spell. I am aware that this is not the Mansion House theory. Last winter a meeting was held at the Mansion House to promote an East End Recreation Scheme. Professor Huxley and Mr. Goschen spoke with impressiveness on the need of the masses for more amusement. Professor Huxley declared it more important than improved lodgings or drainage. Mr. Goschen expressed his fear that "intemperance and other vices were in great part due to the intolerable dulness of the lives of those who had no means of rational amusement." What the Lord Mayor said I have not seen reported, beyond the intimation that he expressed sympathy with the

scheme; but the same evening his lordship presided at a City Missionary Meeting, at which he said that the only real remedy for London wretchedness was the Gospel. In nine cases out of ten, he remarked, people are wretched only because they have done wrong. The primary thing, he urged, is to get men of God to carry the word of God into the houses of the people. No doubt the Lord Mayor spoke from his heart. He is one of those who have found godliness profitable. He dwells in a Palace of Delight. But there are multitudes who have no house, much less a Mansion House, to live in. A thousand years of Gospel preaching has left them paupers in heart, mind, body. Therefore they do not believe that Gospel any more. Christianity was never meant to save mankind from the sufferings of this world by which our masses are afflicted; rather it taught men to endure these earthly griefs and rejoice in them. Christianity never promised temporal and social culture and happiness to the human race. Christians are indeed doing great and charitable work for the poor, but they have not yet managed to utilise institutions dedicated to the jealous deity of Judea for the people of England, or to turn the old God's-spell into a spell that will charm

away the wolf at the door of Poverty, or the more cruel Despair haunting the hearts on their cross, which find their God has forsaken them. In a sense the Lord Mayor was right : a God's spell is needed, glad tidings are needed. There is wanted to charm and enthrall the animal whose creed-chains are broken some enchantment that will put grief to sleep, bring oblivion of haunting cares, raise from their graves all gentle memories, and make the passing moment pure and sweet. Our gentle Shakspeare who used to work miracles in this neighbourhood—the only real miracles, those of art—showed us how ancient spells can be renewed.

“Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountain-tops that freeze,
Bow themselves when he did sing :
To his music, plants and flowers
Ever sprang ; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.

Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or hearing, die.”

Every evening such strains as those might be

heard in Westminster Abbey, in St. Paul's, in many churches ; and if they were we might presently have to remember that other fable, of fair Thebes whose hundred-gated walls rose to the sound of music. Were even church edifices perfectly utilised for promoting purer pleasures and refined tastes among the populace, a new London would rise around us ; it would soon be all a Palace of Delight. Already we have palaces of Art, in our Galleries, Museums, Theatres, though these are closed to those who most need them by being closed on Sunday. Also we have palaces of Delight, such delight as it is. That is, we have gin palaces. The gin palace has to be reckoned with. It has undeniable advantages. In the first place it is open on Sunday. Its splendours alone illumine the Sunday glooms of the winter night, and invite the poor wayfarer to partake a cheap draught of Lethe. Let no man dare to close that palace on Sunday until he has the humanity to throw open on the same day the real Palace of Delight, that which the ages have built in response to human need—the Theatre. The test of a high social civilization is the Sunday Theatre. All other efforts to give the people joy are but makeshifts. By all means let us make the most of these. Our

civilization can do nothing without propitiating the Pentateuch, and for a long time yet we shall repair to Moses to ask what we may do to be saved from our troubles in England. But we must do our best, and our true art will be to advance on the lines of human evolution. Institutions represent wants. They are to be changed to suit new wants. Of what use are London churches during the week? Let them be utilised for music, lectures, discussions for the people. Theatres are multiplied, but there are not enough yet, and they are not cheap enough. Taxes ought to be removed from theatres and stage-plays. Let the tax on delight follow the tax on light. No doubt much will be done when rich men give their wealth religiously, that is, for this world only. At present the great need is to remove obstructions. Take away Sabbath Laws and the palace of Art becomes a palace of Delight. Take away the tax on beauty, and beauty will diffuse itself.

The poet said—

“He who feeds men serveth few,
But he serves all who dares be true.”

It is a dismal thing to find liberal men giving their money in conventional ways—to hospitals and so forth. Let them give their money like

water to take away the obstructions to human development and happiness. A fortune given to unlock the Museum on Sunday would be worth a thousand given to hospitals. A novel like Walter Besant's "All Sorts and Conditions of Men," is a better gift to London than that of George Peabody. It is a blow straight at the Philistine and the Pharisee, who are wasting millions of money in sending Jewish literature to distant savages, while a savage race is growing at their own doors. We hear of the Bitter Cry, but the bitterest cries are unheard or unheeded. The Salvation Army is a cry—a cry for Sunday Minstrels, for some amusement not alcoholic, consistent with piety. The Skeleton Army which pursues it is a cry still more bitter, a cry against the treason of those sanctified roughs to the feud of their order with Pietism. 'Tis the hungry but free wolf's rage against the well-fed hound with his collar. Cries? There were enough in Milton's day for his fine ear to hear them above all the cant and noise of Puritanism, and it is he that has left us the bravest plea for the Sunday Theatre. They have grown more numerous and bitter in our own time, but the fine ears are wanting. The doves have found their protecting

Princess, and the lambs a sympathetic Queen, but apparently no royal heart has yet been moved by the sorrows of a people starving for Beauty.

Yet are there gracious rainbows announcing that the old deluge of Hebraism and Puritanism is subsiding. Leaf after leaf the beautiful world is returning : religious services are becoming musical, out-of-door festivals appear, and the Church has united with the Stage to form a Guild. Many signs declare that the kingdom of Man is at hand. Stand for it, O my friends, and work for it ; give all you can and do all you can to wear away the miserable superstitions which impede the culture, happiness and refinement of the masses. Whatever may be their destiny in some other world, in this their means of grace are science and art, their only heaven the higher world these reveal and interpret. Let there remain one church in London, at any rate, where to satisfy the soul of the hungry with truth and beauty is an object of religious concert and enthusiasm.

APOLOGIA.



APOLOGIA.

(July 27, 1884.)

JUST one-third of a century has passed since I started out to save souls. I had been studying Law, but what had I to do with Blackstone and Coke when all around me were souls blindly plunging into hell? I laid down my law-books, became a Methodist itinerant at nineteen, mounted a horse, and went forth into the highways and by-ways of Maryland, warning people of the wrath to come, and preaching the gospel of salvation by the blood of Christ. Methodism has been rightly called "Christianity in earnest." But a thing needs to be very true if one takes it terribly to heart. The theological doctrines of Methodism are substantially those of the Church of England. The tendency in the Church was to shelve them for Sunday use, to gloze them over, to adapt them

to worldliness, to explain them away. But Methodism took them seriously, accepted those dogmas in all their awful import as the revelation of God. If they were true, they were tremendous truths, they palled the universe with Jehovah's wrath, they revealed millions perishing in eternal torments. For more than a year I did my part towards terrifying people ; and I can now see that dead self of mine, dressed in mourning, going about certain villages and homes in Maryland, bearing a blight for all things glad and beautiful. The smiles of children disappeared as I passed, the dances of young hearts stopped at my approach. Flowers must have bloomed there, birds must have sang there, but I never saw them, never heard them—not for a long time. But my way of pressing every doctrine, and everything in the Bible, to a realistic extreme distressed my hearers. I preached to ten different congregations—preached every day, and twice or thrice on Sundays—and some complained to the Presiding Elder that I mystified and alarmed them by bringing out everything in the Bible too plainly. I was advised to be more discreet. It dawned upon me that it was necessary to take God's word under wise supervision, to correct its tendency

towards plain-spokenness. The first chill fell on my ardour. I was yet in my teens, and very crude, but old enough to feel the inconsistency of becoming a critic of God's revelation.

However, soon I had a revelation of my own. There was a settlement of Hicksites—a variety of Quakers not known in this country—through which I often had to pass. It was a beautiful settlement; mile after mile of pretty homes, each in its smiling field; nowhere a weed or bramble, and everywhere well-dressed negroes working along with the farmers. It was in strong contrast with any place I had seen in the South, almost to be described as a oasis in that poorly cultivated region. When I admired, my Methodist people shook their heads and said, "They are all infidels over there. One of their preachers said the blood of Christ could no more save men than the blood of a bullock." I also found that those Hicksites had a bad name among politicians for something worse: they were opposed to slavery.

Those negroes I saw working in their fields were free—they were paid for their labour. Because the negro could smile there, the fields also smiled. From that oasis of freedom I passed again and again into the land of bondage, and repassed,

and my eyes were opened to the great wrong of my native country. As I rode my lonely circuit I saw, for the first time with human recognition, slaves at their drudgery—men, women, children, toiling in ignorance and hopelessness, never knowing in any hour but that husband, wife, or child, might be sold at auction, to be no more seen.

I had started out from home to save souls from damnation : now here were the damned under my eyes. They were fettered by some who helped to support me, by those who laboured for the salvation of souls from God's wrath, by people holding in horror the unbelief of Hicksites who paid workmen their wages, had good schools and happy homes, but did not believe in the Trinity. My orthodoxy caught fire : it was consumed by a great cause. The hope of seeing slavery lifted from the land, and the beauty of that oasis of free culture spread through my beloved South, rose within me, filled my horizon, until the old heaven of faith was forgotten, Jerusalem receded into antiquity, the dogmas became dry bones. I had not consciously rejected the old theology, but it got outside me.

However, I was not to be rid of the past so easily. My new cause cast a black shadow. On

my long rounds a huge phantom was sure to meet me with warning that if I parted with my orthodoxy it would cost me every friend, every relative, and if I added to it disloyalty to slavery, the South would banish me, if not worse. This phantom filled me with fear for some months, and I went about preaching, with an effort to satisfy my conscience by infusing a little rationalism or philanthropy into my sermons.

Once after I had met my formidable phantom an angel came. It was Emerson—a little book of his which had found its way into my hands. It came to me when I was low enough—sick at heart, fearful, without health or courage. As the hart pants after the water-brooks, so had I longed for this living water, this fountain from the pure soul of a saviour sent to my own need. That book I read on horseback: I read it along lanes, amid forests once darkened with divine wrath, and now for the first time saw the flowers blooming, heard the birds sing—the black veil was removed from the fair face of nature. I was strong again. When the phantom came once more I wrestled with him. I wrestled and prevailed; withdrew from the Methodist Church, declared my heresy, affirmed my opposition to

slavery, and then found that the phantom could not crush me. He could only lame me. That he did. I have never quite recovered from the wrestle with orthodoxy. The loss of early loves and friendships, exile to a life of poverty among strangers, the critical years of youth—each hour a lost opportunity—wasted on dogmas, are serious injuries, however they may be mitigated or whatever the compensations. My knowledge has always lacked those years given to struggle instead of study, and in various ways the excessive pietism of my early life has been avenged too sharply. For I was brought up half in college and half in prayer-meeting. My usual Sunday through boyhood was Sunday School, two or three sermons, and a prayer-meeting to close with ; and this while during the week I was studying Greek and Latin beyond measure. Six days did I labour, but on the seventh toiled on a treadmill of services ; and to this day it gives me a keen delight to see anybody breaking the Sabbath, especially if it is with games and amusements. My secret hope concerning these early losses of mine is, that they may have saved some young people from the like—young people whose parents may have listened to me. I have a

brother who fought bravely through a four years' war, and now he will not let his children kill a mosquito. I suppose I am like him in my horror of all that I know can kill the happiness of youth, or that can chill the affections of life. Others may dislike dogmas because they are erroneous, I dislike only the dogmas that freeze hearts against each other. My rejection of Christianity is not the result of criticism, but because I know that, as it has steeped the earth in blood, so this day it can make loving hearts turn to stone against those to whom they owe love, if these do not share their dogma. The soul of theology is hatred, and there is no demon that can produce so much anguish as hatred. This is my experience. I have lost many sweet intimacies, have suffered years of solitude, all because I could not agree with the metaphysics of preachers who happened to have in their keeping the consciences of my early companions. Happily there are ties too strong and sacred for even Jahvé to break. In my Virginian home Love remained, though for a time draped as for one dead; and one heart even believed in me, I suspect at the cost of her strict orthodoxy. But such inviolable ties are few. As a rule it is

nearly impossible for a pious soul to love anybody its God is believed to hate. They can love the supposed prodigal so long as they hope for his conversion, and love him through immoralities, but when they find that he will never believe their doctrines they deliver him over to God's wrath with cynical hardness. Of course, from their point of view, all that is logical and natural. This life seems to them such a mere point compared with the ages of eternity that its happiness is nothing, its human affections little, compared with the vast future; but already this earthly happiness seemed to me vast, the joys of youth wondrous, the blooms of affection divine. The little I had of healthy human pleasures and social gaieties in early youth has made me rate them so highly that the pursuit and culture of the joy and sweetness and humanities of life have become to me as a religion. It may be that in my ministry I have not made enough of the stern duties and sacrifices of life; if so, it is because Love has seemed to me the fulfilling of the Law. Love carries all duties and sacrifices—making its labours so light that they cease to be sacrifices.

For a time I left behind me all the region of dogmatic discord. I joined the Unitarian body,

and went to prepare myself for the new ministry in their Divinity School, connected with Harvard University. There all was congenial study and liberality. There were struggles going on in some cities between the old Unitarianism and the new, but these were at a distance; here in the centre of Unitarian culture such disputes were known only as agreeable interchanges of opinion. In addition to that of our worthy and liberal professors, I enjoyed the friendship of Emerson, of Parker, of Longfellow, of Garrison and Phillips, and other great men. Having declined proffered paternal assistance in a course disapproved at home, I was very poor, yet my life at Harvard University was happy. When I left it to take charge of the Unitarian Church at Washington I found that, despite the general liberalism of the congregation, Slavery was still too potent at the Capital to tolerate my antislavery discourses, and after a few agitated years there I was compelled to leave. Then I was chosen Minister of the Unitarian Church at Cincinnati, and there had some happy years. But at length my disbelief of miracles brought on a struggle. The Unitarians who believed in miracles seemed to hate me more than the orthodox did when I left them.

They also expected me to be more puritanical in my ways than was possible just after I had risen from the grave of Methodism into a glad world never seen before. Although the Cincinnati congregation stood by me against the opposition, I foresaw that I would soon have to settle up my accounts with Unitarianism.

Then the war broke out, and we threw ourselves into the antislavery cause—for I now had a helper at my side. There was a powerful interest which aimed to secure slavery from the conflagration it had kindled. Every antislavery man and woman had to enlist for that moral struggle. I was then, as now, radically opposed to war, but not to wresting a great compensation from it. The antislavery men did not care in the least about my theological opinions. While I was editing a paper in Boston, and writing books, and lecturing, all against slavery, it seemed to some friends that I might influence opinion in England which was going wrong on the subject, Palmerston and Gladstone being against us. It was thought the English might listen to an antislavery Southerner. I came over, and spoke and wrote a good deal. While so engaged I was glad to preach again, especially as I was invited to a

chapel here far advanced beyond care for Unitarian or other dogmas.

That chapel is the one in which we meet to-day. I began preaching here in September, 1863, so that it is now just twenty-one years since I became your Minister. The Unitarians of London never liked us. During those years I have been treated in a friendly way by some Unitarian Societies in the provinces—Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Newcastle, Preston, Bradford, Bath, Godalming, Liverpool, Nottingham, Huddersfield, Croydon—but have received the cold shoulder from the Unitarian Association. London being its denominational centre our penalties had to be suffered here. I do not complain of the inhospitable treatment received from that quarter, for I long ago recognised the compulsory cause of it. I know that chill theological *aura* of old: the breath of pious hatred is just the same, whether it comes from orthodox or unorthodox people. Unitarianism, despite the generous hearts it includes, taught me, as it had taught my teachers in America, Emerson and Parker, that wherever even the ghost of a shibboleth is retained, the old intolerance and unkindness will lurk in it. If the Christian name be the only shred of a

creed left, then men will say all manner of things against you for Christ's sake, if you do not agree to that shred.

Freedom of thought had gradually taken the place in my religion which freedom of the slave occupied before it was secured. Freedom of thought does not mean that a man can think and speak his honest thought without physical harm ; it means that his thought and speech can be free without bringing upon him ill-will, unkindness, alienation of what is necessary to his or her happiness. It means that every honest thinker shall be the reverse of discouraged—shall be encouraged. The leading Unitarians shewed me that, whatever might be the case with individuals, no organisation bearing the Christian name could treat generously a man who did not accept that name. They might do it, if he were very far off, or after he was dead, but not while he was living and preaching among them. A few years ago the Unitarian body authorised the circulation of Theodore Parker's works. But when I settled here my views were not more heretical than Theodore Parker's. If I have gone farther it may be partly due to the instructive illiberality with which they treated me for holding views they now circulate.

Well, these are old scores, and I gladly leave them. I was still hoping for a faith which would work by love, and next looked to Theism for it. Francis William Newman, one of the best men living, had shewn that Theism, naturally associated itself with high ideas of justice and equality; Miss Cobbe, that it harmonised with profound religious sensibility. I saw Theism grow into a promising movement, but I have seen its decline, and we now hear little of it. This, as I think, is not because Atheism has superseded it, but because Theism aspired to make itself a finality—because it could not take by the hand with cordiality any one who had doubts concerning divine personality, however religious those doubts; however earnest his spirit. But no deity can stand being made a fetter on minds that have thrown off every other fetter. A deity for whom belief is exacted as the test of friendship is by that spirit proved a fiction. A Theist who dislikes an Atheist because he is an Atheist, shows that his Theism doesn't bear as fine fruit as Atheism—that is, if the Atheism be humane and magnanimous. Doctrines can easily be put into plausible words, but by their fruits they are really known. Theism bore few fruits of any kind after it became a quasi-organised

movement, and those fruits were every year more sour.

It became plainer to me by that movement that the virus of theology lurked even in Theism. It seemed to think that what people believe or say about God is of immense importance to God. The important point was whether such belief could enlarge the heart, ennable the spirit, increase the happiness of man. That it did not prove, or attempt to prove. Consequently it appeared that Theism was but a modified belief in the same old deity that had been the source of superstition and intolerance : the advance of knowledge had taken away his thunderbolts, and then taken away the keys of heaven which followed them ; but his egotism survived, and his theologic spirit ; and if, for not believing and worshipping him, he no longer burnt men, or locked them out of heaven, he was still prepared to lock them out of theistic hearts, and sit silent while they were deprived of their freedom and their rights.

Fourteen years ago I had hope in Theism. I then wrote in my book, *The Earthward Pilgrimage* :—“ Simple Theism has but few churches now ; it is a newly-discovered and as yet unexplored continent, but so was America a

little while ago. They who, like Plymouth Pilgrims, have settled in the winter time on its rocky verge, know little as yet of its prairies, savannahs, and eldorados ; but they already see that it is to be the next great home of human hearts and thoughts." But even then I remembered that other hopes as large had been disappointed, and on the next page I wrote :— " That which passes, passes because it is no longer necessary. The traditional creed passes with the need which formed it. Every fossil in the earth tells its story. It is not necessary. Men are virtuous without it. It no longer implies self-denial or any divine passion to believe it. The cross has become golden, and may be coined into money. The virtues it once implied gather with the freethinkers, and reformers who will not bow to it. The impulse which separates them from Christendom is the centre of a new creation. What that new creation will be we can, indeed, only imagine ; but we know that the spirit which built Chistianity when Judaism fell, which built Protestantism when Romanism crumbled, cannot be crushed under the ruins of any temple."

Here rise together from an old phase of faith the hope that Theism is to be the next great home

of the human spirit, and a contemplation of the possibility that it may not prove so, but that a farther shore may appear. To-day I am bound to say that it is not the hope but the misgiving that has proved true. For what has happened since? Theism means belief in God,—and since then the name of God has been legally and politically defined. The nation has been authoritatively given to know what God means. It means a proud monarch, for not believing in whom a parent must be deprived of a child, men must be dragged from their families and shut up in gaol, Members of Parliament must be deprived of their seats and constituencies dishonoured, and ladies refused admission into seats of learning. No,—Theism cannot stand that. No religion can inherit the future which does not bear in it the highest and holiest spirit of our time—its freedom, its justice, its science, its humanity. The name of God has been of late so degraded, it has been so adduced to label public meanness and wrong, that it can never be utilised for any organization that shall represent the supreme ideal and aim of a free and civilised people.

This, you will observe, does not determine anything with regard to the divine existence. It

only determines that the conception of a deity represented in our laws, creeds, customs, is certainly false. The popular notion of a deity is derived from the laws and theology of our time; were it higher, the people would not tolerate the sanctioning of injustice with the name of God. Out of such prevailing notions Theism cannot develop a noble idea of God, any more than one can carve a fair statue out of mud. They who individually have a pure and high conception of divine existence can best promote it for the present by clearing out of laws and institutions the current false and mean ideas of a deity, as one jealous of what people believe about him, angry at being ridiculed. A god who can be insulted is no god at all. A god who can be blasphemed is no god at all. People who believe their God can be blasphemed, people who suppose God cares whether men believe in him or not, people who themselves think a Theist morally better than an Atheist, are one and all believing in an idol that has no more existence than Pluto. So long as this is the kind of god established in the forms of church and state an exact thinker, who wishes to be understood, will not proclaim himself a Theist. No doubt it was for this reason that the greatest

thinkers of the country, even some who, in a sense of their own, do believe in a God, would not adopt Theism; and no new Church could be worth anything that did not draw to itself the unchurched thought and science of the country as the Salvation Army draws its ignorant enthusiasm.

The majority of people say there can be no religion without definite belief in a personal God. The majority, as usual, is wrong. The Confucian religion has no God, Buddhism—the greatest religion in the world—has no God. The notion that a personal God is necessary to religion grows from the same root as that other superstition, that God needs something at men's hands—an ignorant notion, as Paul said, at which a God of the universe could only wink. Why does any one demand a personal God? To influence him by prayer? He would be no God if he did not always do the very best without prompting. To praise him? He would be no God if he desired praise. Or is a personal God needed that we may believe in a purpose running through evil and sorrow, and working to good ends? He would be no God who cannot secure good ends without bad means. A man may have to afflict in order to benefit, because he is finite; but not

an infinite and good power. Religion cannot be detached from moral perfection, and therefore it must be detached from the idea of an omnipotent Personality. Nature does not declare a morally perfect Creator. The very object of religion is to subdue the hardness and redress the evils of nature, which it cannot do while praising the creator of those evils. The believer in a God of revelation does not improve the case, but makes it worse. For the revealed God has all the faults of nature, he is wrathful, vindictive, proud, and it is absurd for religion to try and subdue pride and revenge in a man while worshipping the same in Jahvé. Our excellent friends, the Positivists, have not got out of this vicious circle by deifying (as some seem to do) Humanity ; their brave testimonies against war and every wrong are inconsistent with the worship of Humanity, whose ignorance and brutality cause the wars and the wrongs.

Nevertheless, Positivism at least looks in the right direction. Not the mass of humanity but the excellence of humanity ; not the vast predatory multitude but the best that is in each, the supreme virtue and wisdom and beauty potential in all, flowering in the Sages and Saviours of the race, raise in man the sentiment of religion and

direct its aim. For this reason the religions devoted to invisible gods—theistic religions—have always passed away, or else merged themselves in devotion to human personalities—such as Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Wesley. Theism is a phase of transition. It is a withdrawal of confidence from the established divinity, the purification of the human mind, as Emerson called it; but religion will develop a new practical and actual incarnation of its spirit in movements corresponding to those which in the far past bear imposing individual names. Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ were men, but much more were they the figure-heads of great movements, movements of human religion detaching itself from obsolete and obstructive forms. The influence of Goethe, of Comte, of Carlyle and of Emerson in their several countries, shows that in our own democratic age great men may be identified with vast movements of thought, especially in cultured communities. In New England, when Christianity surrendered to Slavery, Christ hastened to deliver up his place to Emerson—who took the lowly negro under the wing of his genius—and for a generation no religious and emancipated youth in that region loved Christ as he loved Emerson. Amid all this love

and enthusiasm Emerson felt that he was not worthy to tie the shoes of the feet for whose appearance on the mountains he was looking. At length to his lovers also he is becoming a forerunner, a voice that cried in a wilderness since grown populous. There is fair reason to believe that the next world-prophet will be born in America; and the home of all races be the cradle of a universal religion.

I once had the hope that the free and humanitarian Church might be organised in London—great London, metropolis of culture, science, and civilised power! You will remember the Congress of Liberal Thinkers which sat in this building some years ago, animated by that hope. My experience then led to the conviction that England is destined to achieve a different task and fulfil another ideal altogether. The Past is so strong in the Old World, its institutions are so established, that freethought is largely absorbed in mere rebellion, denial, criticism, and free religion naturally runs to individualism. We of this South Place Society have tried to be hospitable to all liberal movements: leaders of Secularism, Positivism, Theism, Christian Unitarianism, Brahmoism, Hinduism, have preached and spoken

here with perfect freedom. We have seen that they cannot combine. They have as little dealings with each other as the Jews and Samaritans. Their respective organizations are circles of individualism; they are held together in their places as if caught in eddies, where they must go round and round, and never mingle in one great flood. And why? The bed of the flood is already occupied. It is filled by a national Church, whose learning, resources, and social strength are such that it would overpower and carry away any large rival organization. The Church has a wing more liberal than Unitarianism more independent than the Independents, and another wing more active than Wesleyanism. It takes the wind out of their sails. They are steadily reduced in social influence and intellectual power. The Church has already a Secularist Bishop and a rationalist Bishop, and some unitarian clergymen, and the liberal religious teachers who hold out against its absorbing power will always be the thinkers of strong individuality, and the workers they can draw to their side.

These groups representing religious individualism appear to me of paramount importance. Each

has grown where humanity needs an organ. I would say this even of living sects farthest removed from my own beliefs. There are enough of them. England, as a geologist might figure, is a vast formation of fossil sects and superstitions; but their successors survive. Amid the cemetery of their dead ancestral sects move this day nearly 150 different denominations. Each is declaring some necessary fact or truth, whether it be with articulate voice, or as stones cry out where priests hold their peace. These sects and societies are in one sense scattered fragments, in another they form a vast aggregate of human sentiment and force. They form together a huge incongruous Argus whose hundred and fifty sharp eyes watch the church sleeplessly, and compel its steady adaptation to the by-ways as well as the highways of humanity.

As one of these societies of individual thinkers—bound together by a common love of certain principles but by no admitted identity of opinion—we may naturally ask ourselves sometimes what has been our degree of success. In the twenty-one years in which we have worked together, we have grown at a fair rate as to numbers; but not so rapidly, because we have aimed at another kind of

growth. If we could only have stayed where we began—kept to our prayers and to some kind of theology—we might have carried with us some worthy people whom we have contributed to other societies. We have not, in this sense, spent up to our income, and so we have grown steadily ; but I have had to make severe demands upon this society in the interests of truth, as I conceived it, and it has always responded bravely at whatever cost to popularity, or to size. These demands have always been painful to me : some of the ache of the old wound of parting with Methodism returned so often as I have had to affirm here some fresh conviction that might bring into doubt a hope or a sentiment of my trustful friends, or even drive some from us in our weaker days. But now that we look back upon it all, it appears to me that we may claim the success of having shewn the entire truthfulness of the principle on which this society was founded. We have proved that religious life and growth and fruit are not dependent on any creed or any theology. We have proved that a religious society—an influential church—can exist, can co-operate, can flourish, in absolute freedom, without insisting on doctrines deemed fundamental even

by many liberals, and without the prestige of the Christian name.

That is our success, and it is an essentially religious success. People may attribute it to one thing or another. One eminent preacher said that you filled this place because I talked chiefly of politics. I suspect the very little I have ever said about politics was just what you would rather have spared. Another person once reported that you came here to listen to popular songs! The explanations of our admitted vitality and prosperity have been various, but I have ministered to many congregations in my life and do really know something about this matter. We have kept together and grown in harmony and strength by the development of the religious life; by which I mean the cultivation of a love and reverence for what is morally good, for rectitude and justice, for the high ideal of life and character, for unselfishness, for the service of mankind. These things are simple. They require neither genius or learning for their discovery, but by study, by sympathy, by meditation on them day and night, these simple principles may become our delight, they may open depths of feeling and joy in ourselves, they may raise in us that most

pure passion which idealises life. Behold these sisters of mine around me—these good women who have gathered here from year to year, in numbers equal to the men! Be sure they would never come here for politics, or for sensational speaking. Women are religious by instinct, and they have to train the earliest and tenderest growths of morality and duty in children. When men desert the old temples women will still repair to them, unless they can find better, and they are right, for spiritual natures can bloom even amid ruins where the memories of beautiful souls still linger. We owe the presence of these women—the earnestness with which they have furthered this society, the grace with which they have invested it,—to the religious heart that has been beating here from the time of your fathers. For I did but step in to carry on as well as I could the work begun here sixty years ago by the orator whom I followed to the grave—William Johnstone Fox. I never heard him preach, but knew him, and believe his power lay even more in his humanity than in his eloquence. Little as I could hope to fill his place where others had failed, or to revive the chapel which seemed about to close, I felt that it was my natural home.

I had travelled the same path as that man ; had begun as an orthodox preacher setting out to save men from hell, and had found the hell to be Slavery as he had found it to be cruel Corn Laws. To the last his aim was human salvation, and a chapel animated by that spirit was friendly shelter for a Methodist itinerant who had parted with his creed to keep his faith. In 1729 an Oxford student humorously called the Brothers Wesley "Methodists" because they made all their engagements square with their religious duties. That is now the name of the largest Church in America. Method means order adapted to an end. The bones of a body set in a row would be in order, combined in a skeleton they would show method. Methodism was a system perfectly adapted to save men from hell, only the particular hell it dreaded was fictitious. None the less does the longing to save constitute the vital breath of religion, and a man is still a Methodist if he abandon methods that cannot reach the evils of his time for others that can reach them.

There is a legend that on the flight into Egypt, Mary bore her holy babe on her arm so long that at last her arm failed and fell at her side ; whereupon another arm, a third, started out from her

shoulder to sustain the child. In my own youth parental piety placed in my arms also a holy child : that charge was called the human soul, and I was taught that the highest object of life was to save it from the world, the flesh, the devil; all seeking to destroy it. I bore it on my Methodist arm until that gave way. It gave way because I learned that the human soul was not in any such danger : the child entrusted to me was humanity, and its destroyer in my region was not Satan but Slavery. Methodism was helpless against Slavery, therefore that arm failed, and another grew out. When the weary antislavery struggle ended I saw that my holy burden was still pursued and endangered by superstition, by ignorance, and fear. I have still that babe in my arms, and shall try and bear it and defend it wherever I go.

And you also, as a society, have the same high cause, the same holy humanity, to bear, and though to-day one of your arms is giving way, another and a stronger will grow in its place. So long as the spirit that seeks to save men from every evil remains here, you need not fear who goes : love and truth will put forth new arms to meet new needs ; your heart and your courage will not fail. You can hardly expect a great popular success.

That kind of success would most likely mean failure in your higher aim. In the political world, in our own time, we have seen radicalism win a suicidal triumph. The men that used to maintain every high human cause, and hold an unsheathed sword of justice over every government, have now become the government ; but what have become of the standards they once bore so bravely ? The cause of woman is trampled, and they are silent ; unrighteous wars are waged against the weak, and they are silent ; slavery is sanctioned by English authority in Soudan, on this jubilee year of emancipation, and they are silent ; honest men are denied their rights, are thrown into prison for their opinions, and they are silent. That is a fatal kind of success, and I trust that religious radicalism will never achieve it. It had been a happier triumph for the political reformers to preserve their independence and direct the government from without. I cannot but regard a free religious society as the salt of popular religion. It can only preserve its savour by independence. So long as you can preserve love of humanity, of human virtues, and religious earnestness, and remain independent of dogmas—so long as you can show moral enthusiasm and religious culture

increased by separation from creeds—you will exert a powerful influence on the sectarian and ecclesiastical world. More and more will their creeds melt away; more and more will they buy oil for their lamps where you got yours. They will have to retain their hold on young hearts and aspiring minds by larger measures of liberty and charity, until at last the old system will break down.

I do not suppose that the Church of England will be disestablished, because I believe it will be converted. There are angels hovering around it—Science, Art, the angel of the World, they are struggling with its dismal creeds, shaming its superstitions, and they will humanise it. The religious freedom of this South Place Society is one of good angels of the Church; even some clergymen have recognised that we are labouring for their redemption from degrading bonds. And so, in the ancient language, to this Angel of the Church of England, keeping watch and ward at South Place, I would write—Leave not your first love! As you were born of spiritual freedom, uphold that cause above every spiritual oppression. Let your light be kept trimmed and burning, that wanderers in the dark may find here shelter and sympathy. Be of one mind. Let Christians

pause amid their disputes any say—See how these untheological people love one another. Let them see also how you love them. If they do not love you it is because they are afraid: they have never been where you are, and tremble at going into what to them is the dark. But we have been where they are; we have been orthodox, or our relatives and teachers have been, and we know how much sweetness and charity may abide with orthodoxy. So, speak your truth with the love that never faileth. And let the Angel that has to watch and teach the Church until it be saved from error, be assured that he can never influence where he does not understand, and where he does not sympathise. It is easy to show the literal absurdity of dogmas and superstitions; not so easy, but much more important, to study their history, to understand them, to comprehend their relation to human development and sentiment. Every superstition is also a poem. Every dogma is a seed cast from some past flower of faith. The only useful denial of a traditional error is to explain it—to discover the truth it distorts, and restore that truth in more than pristine beauty. Men may meet denial with denial, but they will not readily smite the face of Truth if her beauty

appear and her voice be low. In the course of my ministry here, which began when I was still young, I have not always observed these principles : they have grown out of my experience ; they have been taught me by my faults and failures and by my little successes ; and I give them to you with all good hope, with my grateful love, and with my farewell.



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